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THE STUDY OF THE BIBLE :

A SERIES OF CHAPTERS INTENDED TO
PROMOTE TRUTH AND UNITY.

BY HENRY DUNN,

OF THE BRITISH AND FOREIGN SCHOOL SOCIETY.



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THE STUDY OF THE BIBLE.

CHAPTER I.

ON BIBLICAL INTERPRETATION.

IN preparing this Work we have simply asked ourselves one question,—‘*Why is it* that Christian people read the Bible so differently?’ that conflicting Sects alike appeal to it as the sole authority for their respective views? that Doctrines the most diverse are supposed to be equally well sustained by its statements? that as age after age rolls on, each coming generation repeats, to a great extent, the opinions of its predecessors,—follows, as a rule, the same lines of thought,—lives nearly the same life,—nourishes the same prejudices, and stereotypes at once old formulas and old divisions ?

In searching for an answer we have been led to conclude that the true explanation will be found in that prevailing neglect of the Bible, *as a whole*, which arises from its being almost always read in mere fragments; in *forgetfulness* of

* We say ‘to a great extent,’ because it would be folly to deny that many important changes for the better, both in religious thought and action, have taken place during the last century. For these, let us be thankful. The general view we have taken is not, however, materially affected by this admission.

the particular purpose for which the Book was given ; in *confusions* regarding its Inspiration ; in *errors* relating to the Holy Spirit ; in the confounding of *revealed facts* with *human inferences* ; in Bias of one kind or another ; in reading, either for 'edification,' or for the kindling of devout feeling, without first ascertaining *the meaning* of that which is read ; in the habit of *accommodating* Scripture, or of *perverting* it, by the exaggeration, projection, or other misapplication of texts ; in *allegorizing*, under the influence of an unbridled fancy ; in the *abuse* of Parallel passages and references ; in that *darkening* of the sense which is frequently occasioned by injudicious division into Chapters and Verses ; in the *acceptance* of interpretations drawn only from Hymns ; in the *neglect* and consequent abuse of unfulfilled Prophecy ; in *inattention* to the character of the particular Dispensation under which we are living ; in *errors* as to Church Authority, and the value of Tradition ; in *undue reliance* on the professional labours of the Clergy ; in turning Helps into Hindrances ; and, above all, in *habitual indifference* to the demand Scripture makes on every man for prolonged study, as an essential pre-requisite to the elevation by its means of moral character.

To each of these points we propose to direct attention.

On BIBLICAL INTERPRETATION, regarded as a Science, we shall offer only a few general remarks.

This Science, like most others, has a History, by the study of which its value and character will best be understood.

It *commenced* with the Jews, in relation, of course, to the OLD TESTAMENT, and was carried on, with amazing learning and ingenuity, by the Rabbis for many centuries. It then *comprised*, on the one hand, the Traditions of the Church, and, on the other, the Expositions of the Doctors. The

former were, for the most part, supposed to have been delivered to Moses while in the Mount, and subsequently transmitted, through Prophets and Priests, to later times ; the *latter* were the result of the accumulated wisdom of the ages.

And now the question arises,—‘ *What was all this worth?*’ Christ and His Apostles furnish us with a reply. Ye have made, says our Lord to the Pharisees, the commandment of God ‘ *of none effect through your tradition* ’ (Mark vii. 13). Ye are ‘redeemed,’ says St. Peter, from your ‘vain conversation received *by tradition* from your fathers’ (1 Pet. i. 18). ‘Beware,’ says St. Paul, ‘lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, *after the tradition of men*’ (Col. ii. 8).

After the death of the Apostles, and the cessation of *inspired* oral teaching, the NEW TESTAMENT became subject to the very same process which had destroyed the value of the Old. Tradition again raised its head. The Apostles, it was said, delivered many things to the Primitive Church only by word of mouth ; which things, having been transmitted through faithful men, ought to be regarded, in some cases, as *authorized explanations* of the written Word, and in other cases as *useful additions* to its testimony ;—a theory which, as before, soon made the commandment of God of none effect. *Exposition* speedily followed ; and under the impression that Truth was to be *developed out of* the Bible, rather than found *in* it, men, mighty in intellect, but not above their age in Divine knowledge,—sometimes ambitious of power, and often superstitious,—laid broad and deep the foundations of SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY.

Three eras in the growth of this Science may be distinctly marked.

The *first* is that of Origen, who was born about ninety

years after the death of the Apostle John, and who, as an Expositor, exercised great influence in his day. Regarding him, as we fairly may, as the Representative Man of his time, we find that now a *two-fold sense*, and a *four-fold application*, were supposed to attach to almost every text in Scripture,—a method of interpretation loose enough for the exercise of the most lively fancy, and eminently favourable to the incursions of subtle intellects. Under this treatment the simplicity of Evangelical Truth rapidly disappeared.

The *second era* is that of Vincent of Lerins (A.D. 440), who, partly in consequence of the interminable varieties of opinion introduced by the Mystics, and partly to prevent the growth of any sentiment unfavourable to Church ascendancy, laid down this rule,—Nothing is to be received as Gospel truth which has not been ‘believed everywhere, always, and by all.’ This formula, which was intended to confine the interpretation of Scripture to the explanations of the more orthodox Ecclesiastics, was generally adopted during the ‘Middle Ages,’ and is still the stronghold of the advocates of what are usually called ‘CHURCH PRINCIPLES.’

The *third era* is that of the Reformers, who set out with a profession of adherence to the literal and grammatical meaning of the Word, but were very soon driven into the adoption of most of the views held by those of ‘the Fathers’ who lived before the completion of the Romish apostasy, and were generally accounted Evangelical. Amongst these, Augustine always held the chief place.

The *present rule* is, to interpret Scripture according to the creed of the Church to which the expositor may belong,—some inclining to rationalistic methods, others to mystical views, but Protestant Evangelical Christians

adhering in the main to the doctrines held, first by the Reformers, and subsequently by the Puritans.

A revision of the whole subject is now earnestly demanded; sometimes by men who have lost faith in Scripture altogether, but more frequently by those who hope and believe that what is true and good in the expositions of the past will only be the more firmly established by renewed investigation; that mere accretions, the errors and exaggerations which old prejudices and still pending strifes have gathered around the pure Word, will be purged away; and that, under the influence of honesty and common sense, of candour and of calmness, the Gospel in all its simplicity may once more be restored to us, and 'a world wearied of the heat and dust of controversy, of speculations about God and man,—weary too of the rapidity of its own motion,—may, to some extent at least, return home and find rest.'

Before this can be done, however, two questions must be settled.

The *first* is, Whether or no the Bible is to be interpreted like any other book?

The *second* is, Whether it is to be regarded as having more than one meaning?

On the answer given to these two questions almost everything depends.

We have here nothing to do with what Mr. Jowett or any one else may by some be supposed to wish or mean in saying, 'Interpret the Scriptures like any other book;' we simply inquire whether or no the rule, in its practical application, is a sound and good one?

Properly understood, we think it is. We say *properly understood*, for it is not fair to say that such a rule ignores the peculiarities which distinguish the Bible from unin-

spired productions. It does no such thing. As well might it be pretended that its application to Bunyan's 'Pilgrim's Progress' would prevent that book from being recognised as an allegorical record of Christian experience.

What is *meant* by the rule is plain enough, viz., that the Bible must be interpreted by the common laws of language, just as every other book must be interpreted. And surely this may be done without ceasing to bear in mind that Scripture is *a connected series* of tracts, written without concert by men living fifteen hundred years apart; that some things in it are typical, and others prophetic; that there is parable in it as well as poetry; and that much relates to modes of life and conditions of society very different from our own.

What is intended to be *forbidden* by the rule is, that method of interpreting Scripture which disregards the context; which often makes mere sound 'an echo to the sense;' which is ever looking for meanings which the words do not convey; and which ends in transforming the Bible into a book without any definite or proper meaning of its own.

The *second* question, Whether the Bible ought or ought not to be regarded as having more than one meaning?—viz., that which it had to the Prophet or Evangelist who speaks, or to the people who first listened, can, in like manner, only be answered *as it is understood*.

If by this statement is meant that the Old Testament Prophets always comprehended the depth of their own utterances, or that the people who, at a later period, heard the words of our Lord and His disciples, fully understood the teaching, nothing can be more delusive. For who does not know that Daniel says, 'I heard, but I understood not;' that the Evangelists frequently confess their igno-

rance of sayings which were not made plain until after the Resurrection; that again and again it is recorded of the multitude that 'they understood Him not'?

But is it fair to argue that because Prophets, Evangelists, or people confess ignorance, therefore Scripture has not *one plain and primitive meaning*? or to proclaim, with something like exultation, that Parables have two meanings, and Prophecies many? We think not; for the *meaning* of Scripture is one thing, and its *capacity of application*, or its expression in figurative language, is quite another thing. It is, in truth, but trifling with serious matters to maintain, as has recently been done, that if the rule in question be affirmed, the declaration, 'Judah is a lion's whelp,' must of necessity be construed literally.

The *real* question at issue is,—'Are we to follow the Fathers into mystical and allegorical explanations of the Word of God, or are we to receive it like little children, in its plain, natural, and obvious meaning? In other words, are we to deal with the Holy Scriptures of the New Testament as the Jews dealt with the Old? as the Hindoo has done with the Vedas? as the Mohammedan does with the Koran?'

Before we decide, let us consider what the decision involves. The mystical method is a two-edged sword, and can cut with equal sharpness in opposite directions. If it can turn the scarlet cord of Rahab into a type of the blood of Christ, it can also convert the voice of the Lord to Abram, into 'the fierce ritual of Syria,' bidding, '*with the awe of a Divine voice*,' Abraham to slay his son. If, in expounding Ezekiel (xxxiv. 23, 24; xxxvii. 22—28), 'David my servant' may be changed into Christ the Son, it seems difficult to perceive why the angel who slew the firstborn may not also be transformed into 'the Bedouin

host,' who were 'akin to Jethro, and, more remotely, to Israel.'

One word in conclusion. Let no one say in his 'haste' that he has nothing to do with principles of Biblical Interpretation; that the poor and the ignorant, to whom the Gospel was primarily sent, can never be benefited by such inquiries; that simple-minded Christians are happily unaffected by discussions which relate to difficulties they have never felt, and into the merits of which they are in a great measure incapacitated from entering.

This is not true; for, as has been well said, 'the *healthy tone* of religion among the poor and uneducated *depends*, to a very great extent, on the truthfulness of the doctrines they are taught by their superiors. *Truth* is to the world what *holiness of life* is to the individual,—the source of justice, peace, and good.' The Reformation from Popery would never have been achieved but for controversies which must have been to many a pious heart of that day the source of unmixed pain and regret.

The discussions that distress us now will be blest indeed if they lead, as we trust they will, to the conviction that 'Biblical Criticism has hitherto hung to the past, and been truer to the traditions of the Church than to the words of Christ;' that he who wants to know, 'not what Scripture *may be made* to mean, but what it *really does* mean,' may, by 'confining himself to the plain meaning of words, and the study of their context, obtain a deeper insight into the original spirit and intention of the New Testament than was ever possessed by the controversial writers of former ages;' that *the one great qualification* for understanding Scripture is, that moral sympathy with God which overcomes prejudices as well as passions, and makes familiarity with His word essential to happiness.



CHAPTER II.

THE BIBLE A NEGLECTED BOOK.

“ Our books, well trimmed and in the gayest style,
Like armies standing close in rank and file,
Adorn our intellects as well as shelves,
And teach us notions splendid as themselves :
The Bible only stands neglected there,
Though that of all most worthy of our care :
This, like an infant, troublesome awake,
Is left *to sleep, for peace and quiet sake.*”

COWPER.

MANY years ago we wrote and published these words :—
‘ No book in the world was ever so generally possessed,
and so little comprehended, as an English Bible in the
present day. Everything in society is unfavourable to its
profitable perusal ;—the ceaseless activities of the good,
and the restless insinuations of the bad,—textual preach-
ing and tormenting criticism,—the multiplication of books,
and the mingling of things sacred and profane, *all* tend to
keep men from feeding in green pastures, or reposing by
the side of still waters. And so it comes to pass, amid
many other contradictory things, that while the Bible is
more widely circulated than ever, it is much less *read*
than formerly, and scarcely at all understood.

‘ The result is—for that which affects the people affects
the priest,—that while public worship was never so well

attended as at present, the pulpit was never so powerless ; conduct in the counting-house never so independent of attention in the pew ; scepticism never so rampant ; and *happy* Christians never so rare.'

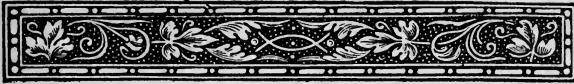
We see no reason either to retract or to modify these *sad* convictions.

Sad when it is recollected that the Book to which they relate is one to which we are indebted for more than we can well express ; for all our knowledge of the greatest fact in existence,—the birth of the world in which we live ; for the only authentic account we possess of the origin and infancy of its inhabitants ; for all we know about the introduction of natural and moral evil into it ; and for all we can rely upon in relation to the hopes and prospects which await mankind beyond the grave.

Sad when we reflect that this neglected Volume is the great charter of human freedom, and the sole controller of its excesses ; that by saving us from discord, revolution, and crime, it has more than once proved that our institutions have no permanent basis, and our liberties no safeguard, apart from the virtues it inculcates, and the spirit it fosters.

Sad when we remember that no study is so exciting, expanding, and ennobling, as that of Holy Scripture ; that every page is marked by a majesty and purity which belong to no other composition ; that no man can long breathe its atmosphere without purifying his taste, enlarging his mind, and improving his heart.

Saddest of all when we think of it as the chief storehouse of *Divine* truth ; the only key to the mysteries of existence ; the sure revelation of mercy to sinners ; the basis of all practical virtue ; the STATUTE-BOOK OF HEAVEN.



CHAPTER III.

FOR WHAT PURPOSE WAS HOLY SCRIPTURE GIVEN ?

“Lamp of our feet, whereby we trace
Our path, when wont to stray ;
Stream from the fount of heavenly grace !
Brook by the traveller’s way !
Word of the ever living God !
Will of His glorious Son !
Without thee, how could earth be trod ?
Or Heaven itself be won ?”

BERNARD BARTON.

EVERY book has, or ought to have, a distinct object. What then, is the object of the Bible ?

The answer is at hand. It professes to enlighten us as to our true *relation* to our Creator ; as to our *duties* in this world ; and as to our *destiny* in the world to come.

It has sometimes been said, and urged too, as a reason for neglecting Divine revelation, that the Bible deals with things *beyond* our experience and comprehension ; that it has little to do with the every-day work of a practical man’s life ; that it is a book full of mysteries ; and that it treats of matters regarding which nothing certain can by any possibility be known.

But this is not true. Nor would it be asserted, but for certain mistakes that men fall into, in consequence of con-

founding the things which it reveals with the things which it merely hints at.

Properly speaking, the Book *reveals* only that which really belongs to man—the present, which is his possession, and the future, which is his inheritance. To many things it only incidentally refers: speaking, for instance, of other beings and other worlds, with much beside, simply to the extent, and no further, than seems to be needful in order to our true comprehension of the position we occupy in the universe. To fix our attention on these mere *accessories*; to create difficulties out of *them*; and to neglect the immediate object of the revelation, is, to say the least of it, unpractical and absurd.

We would not, for a single moment, underrate, even in the slightest degree, the importance of these incidental communications. On the contrary, we receive them with a thankful wonder. For we cannot forget that we have no other account, besides that given in the Bible, of the most important events that have educated the race, and made men what they now are.

But we say again, as these things are not the *object* of the Book, so difficulties relating to them, however formidable, can afford no good reason for neglecting or rejecting its immediate message to ourselves, as creatures of God, destined, in one form or other, to fulfil the ends of our existence, whether in this world or in that which is to come.

Further, the Bible always presupposes other and prior revelations.

NATURE is a revelation. ‘The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament sheweth His handywork. Day unto day uttereth speech, and night unto night showeth knowledge. There is no speech nor language, where their voice is not heard. Their line is gone out

through all the earth, and their words to the end of the world' (Psa. xix. 1—4).

It was the neglect of Nature's voice which rendered the idolatry of the heathen inexcusable. 'For the *invisible* things of Him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse' (Rom. i. 20).

The PROVIDENCE of God is, again, a continual revelation. Paul, in addressing the Athenians, could appeal on this ground to heathen poets: 'As certain also of your own poets have said, For we are also His offspring.'

Forgetfulness of this truth plunged the ancients into ever deepening error. 'When they knew God, they glorified Him not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened' (Rom. i. 21).

The *peculiarity* of the later revelation, that of God in Christ, is that it was embodied in a Person, and that it exists for us as a WRITTEN BOOK.

To its presentation in this shape, many persons fancy they see insuperable objections. We can scarcely imagine, however, that it could have been given otherwise. A direct revelation to each individual personally and separately would, *if effectual*, offer such violence to human nature, that freedom, both of choice and action, would be destroyed by it; while if otherwise—making no deep and strong impression on the mind,—such a communication would soon come to be regarded as *unreal*, the result of natural causes, and the mere effect of a disturbed imagination. Imposture, under such a state of things, would be sure to abound, and enthusiasm would supersede reason altogether.

The mode actually adopted, that of first qualifying individuals, by indisputable credentials, to instruct others as to the will of God, and then preserving their teaching in writing, is obviously the best, if not the only method in which the work could have been accomplished. It is plainly a more secure method for conveying truth than tradition could ever be; it is freer from liability to suspicion of fraud or contrivance; it throws that which is taught open at all times to the investigation of every man; and it has this great advantage,—it is the only natural and *human* method. ‘Everything that is of consequence man desires to have *in writing*. By its means laws are promulgated, arts and sciences spread, and titles and estates are secured. All that we know of History comes down to us in books; tradition passes away like the morning cloud, but books may live as long as the sun and moon endure.’

Add to these considerations the fact that God, although invisible, is ever bearing witness to the truth of this written Revelation by a voice within; that without other evidence than that which is *internal*, its revelations are at once recognised as realities by ‘the lowly heart and pure;’ that it is the only key that fits the wards of human consciousness; that, to the poor and uninstructed, it comes home like a familiar thing,—and we are forced to confess that, stereotyped as it is in paragraphs and in letters, it yet bears about with it all the characteristics of perpetual life, and is capable of being made the common property of all the children of men.

We are not quite sure that the Bible was intended to be so direct an instrument in the *conversion* of the world as is usually supposed. That work seems rather to be the peculiar responsibility of Christians; to be accomplished by the living voice, and the power of a holy example.

The Bible, regarded as a book, is not so much intended for the unbeliever as for the believer. Its chief aim and end is to *elevate* the Christian; to bring him closer to Christ; to teach, and to enable him, by faith in the Redeemer, to live a higher life than others,—a life of self-denial, of unworldliness, and of disinterested love. This seems to be the view taken of Scripture by St. Paul, when he speaks of it to Timothy, as ‘profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, *that the man of God* may be perfect, throughly furnished unto all good works’ (2 Tim. iii. 16, 17).

Happy indeed shall we be if permitted to enjoy however small a measure of success, in calling attention to its claims; in removing obstacles to its comprehension; or in restoring it to that *supremacy* which is its rightful place, and apart from which it can never accomplish the great purposes for which it has been bestowed.

In contributing what little we can towards this result, may the Father of Lights be pleased to vouchsafe unto us His holy guidance and benediction.

O Holy and Eternal Spirit, who alone canst “enrich with all utterance and knowledge,” and “who sendest out Thy Seraphim with the hallowed fire of the Altar to touch and purify the lips of whom Thou pleasest,” kindle throughout our land Diviner appetites, and teach us to love that Book which, mighty through Thee, can alone control the turbulence of the will, calm the restlessness of the intellect, or satisfy the hunger of the heart.



CHAPTER IV.

WAS THE BIBLE INTENDED TO BE UNDERSTOOD BY THE UNLEARNED ?

“The Sacred Book,
In dusty sequestration held too long,
Now takes the accents of our native tongue ;
And he who guides the plough or wields the crook,
With understanding spirit now may look
Upon her records, listen to her song,
And sift her law, much wond’ring that the wrong
Which faith has suffered heaven could calmly brook.”

WORDSWORTH.

IF the great principle of our Protestantism be of any practical value, the Bible must be a *popular* book, written for and addressed to, the masses of mankind.

Further, if, as we profess, it is the gift of One who never deludes us by unrealities, it is impossible that it should need for its comprehension—so far, at least, as all practical purposes are concerned—anything beyond *moral sympathy*, and that *common sense* which is pre-eminently the inheritance of the people.

The *history* of the Book justifies this supposition. The words of Moses were chiefly addressed to semi-barbarous tribes ; the utterances of the prophets were proclaimed to their countrymen without distinction of class ; the songs of David were embodied in public worship ; the words of

Christ were spoken to the fishermen and artisans of Judea ; and the Epistles were written to persons who were, probably, in the main, uneducated.

It will, we know, be said in reply, that the utterances of the prophets, the teaching of the Lord, and the letters of His apostles, were all given forth in *the language* of the people to whom they were addressed ; that the figures, allusions, and illustrations, which are so numerous in Scripture, were all taken from their daily life ; and that it by no means follows that what was familiar to them must of course be intelligible to persons in totally different circumstances.

We grant this fully. Neither common sense nor moral sympathy with God will enable a man either to translate for himself, or to correct the errors of translators.* But we are not speaking of the Bible as it was originally written, either in Hebrew or in Greek, but as presented to the English people in the Authorized Version. We are not supposing that version to be faultless,—far from it ; but we are certainly taking for granted (and few will dispute the fact) that it is, *in the main*, singularly faithful and fair. And it is in relation to *this* volume, regarded as, on the whole, a true presentation of the *contents* of the Bible, that we affirm Scripture to be intelligible to ordinary understandings, and suited to ordinary wants.

We maintain that the same God who has adapted the Bible to the mind of man has adapted the mind of man to the Bible. The apostolic authors constantly assume this. They assume ‘ the existence in all men of a spiritual discernment, entering the mind *when unclouded by appetite or passion*, to recognise and distinguish the Divine voice, whether uttered from within by the intimations of conscience, or speaking from without in the language of

inspired oracles. They presuppose, that vigour of reasoning may consist with feebleness of understanding; and that the power of discerning between religious truth and error does not chiefly depend on the culture, or on the exercise of the mere argumentative faculty. The especial patrimony of the poor, the Gospel has been the stay of countless millions who never framed a syllogism.'

To slaves and peasants, and to the uninstructed generally, explain it as we may, the Book carries its own evidence with it, and truth, like the sun, is by them seen in its own light. There is, without doubt, *a sense of certainty*, in relation to Scripture, which belongs to the simple-minded, and to such alone; a conviction which is neither the offspring of reason nor the result of culture, but, like life itself, a direct inspiration of the Almighty. Such persons, independently of all study or learning, and apart from all reasoning, are, *in the state of the heart alone*, amply furnished with defences against falsehood, and are able to discern betwixt truth and error.

If it were not so, *he* would be the firmest believer who enjoyed the greatest advantages for obtaining and weighing proofs; truth would be the property of the few; and the multitude, if they believed at all, could only do so on the authority of those who were favoured with opportunities for research. But the very reverse of all this is the fact. The doubter is commonly the man of high attainment, of cultivated understanding, of varied learning. The peaceful and happy believer is he who has the witness in himself, and who cuts through the web of all sophistry with the simple exclamation, 'I *know* it and *feel* it to be true.'

Strange, then, indeed is it that so many teach and believe that the acceptance of *the Bible alone*, however sincere and heartfelt, can in itself inspire no Christian

confidence, since such a profession may mean anything or nothing ; that the Book is one from which doctrines of all kinds, even the most contradictory, may be at least plausibly supported ; and that, apart from a *more definite expression* of the truth it involves than is given in the Sacred Page, it can convey no *certain* sound ; that it is, in short, only to be regarded as truly received when it is understood in a given sense, and expounded in harmony with the confessions of *the Church*, whatever that term may be supposed to mean.

Such we believe to be, at the present day, the accredited opinion of the Christian world ; and we are disposed to regard its frequent assertion as the expression of a conviction which is partly honest, and partly dishonest : *honest*, however mistaken, when it proceeds from self-distrust,—from undue veneration for accomplished commentators,—from the overruling power of hereditary teaching,—or from the perplexity which is naturally engendered by diversities of judgment and multiplied sects ; *dishonest*, when it is adopted from a desire to prop up any existing ecclesiastical organization,—when it springs from a disposition to exalt human creeds, catechisms, and formularies, over Divine teachings,—or when, as is often the case, it is made an excuse either for the neglect or disbelief of Scripture altogether.

But whether honest or dishonest, nothing is more certain than that such a persuasion is in itself singularly mischievous ; since it furnishes, on the one hand, the most plausible of all arguments in support of modern assertions that a revelation from God, by or through a book, is impossible ; and since it sustains, on the other, the contemptible assumptions of those who pretend that the Bible was never intended to be read without an authorized interpreter,

and that the Church, or the Pope, as the case may be, should be regarded as the representative of Christ on earth for this purpose.

Further, this notion of the *indefiniteness* of Scripture, when regarded apart from a given interpretation, is as senseless as it is mischievous; for no delusion can be greater than to suppose that we do *really* give a more explicit character to Gospel truth, and that we bind men more firmly to it, when, having exchanged the Divine for a human expression, and transferred, as we fondly imagine, the spirit of Scripture into the substance of theological propositions, we demand adherence, in some form or other, to 'the idol' we have set up. It never seems to occur to us that the absence of any such compendium in Scripture clearly indicates its undesirableness; that in that which is *omitted*, as much as in that which is included, we ought to see the Divine wisdom; that in this, as in so many other things, 'the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God stronger than men.'

The truth is, the moment we attempt to condense or translate words that are 'spirit and life,' into forms of thought which are neither 'the one nor the other, we more or less *change* their meaning, and insensibly become expositors of the Word. And since we do this, only that we may more effectually 'judge' as to the reality of one another's faith, God frowns on our devices by confounding our language; so that it comes to pass that the very words and phrases in which we express our convictions, and by which we hope to promote oneness, are changed into 'traps and snares,' amid which we 'fall, and are broken.' Nothing more is needed to explain the endless divisions of Christendom than the general abandonment of the 'unity of the Spirit,' gathered from the Word itself, for the false

lights of an imaginary and impracticable uniformity, sought in the more definite expression of truth by theological propositions.

Away, then, with the God-dishonouring notion that Divine Revelation is either unintelligible or indefinite. 'There is no reason whatever, in the nature of things, why Holy Scripture should not be as well and as uniformly understood by those who read it, as any other book of similar date, now chiefly known through translations.'

Granting, as we cheerfully do, that some peculiarities attach to the *Old Testament* which make its actual interpretation difficult, and which have 'encouraged critics to take such liberties with Hebrew as they could not venture upon with languages of which we have more ample remains,'—the *New Testament Scriptures* are absolutely free from any difficulty which is not common to all ancient books. 'Other writings are preserved to us in dead languages,—Greek, Latin, Oriental,—some of them in fragments, and all of them originally in manuscript. Difficulties occur in *them* similar to those which attach to Scripture; these are found equally in sacred and in profane literature. But the meaning of classical authors is known with comparative certainty; and the interpretation of them seems to rest on a scientific basis. It is not, therefore, to philological or historical difficulties that the greater part of the uncertainty in the interpretation of Scripture is to be attributed. No ignorance of Hebrew or Greek is sufficient to account for it.'

What the hindrances to its profitable comprehension really are, will become more evident as we proceed with our allotted task.



CHAPTER V.

WITH WHAT AUTHORITY DOES THE BOOK SPEAK ?

“ It is the Book of God. What if I should
Say God of books ?
Let him that looks
Angry at that expression, as too bold,
His thoughts in silence smother,
Till he find such another.”

GEORGE HERBERT.

WE regard the Bible as possessing *Divine* authority.

The *proof* of this, however, opens up a field of inquiry into which we cannot here enter. It is an investigation for which the multitude are, in many respects, unprepared; which few can tread with an independent step; and which in any case demands an expenditure of time and energy far beyond the available resources of ordinary men.

But it does not thence follow that everything must be taken on trust; for the results of the labours of many generations in this department are now open to every eye, and may be mastered without difficulty.

Short of this degree of research, the simplest course is—in the absence of that *internal evidence* which is a later result of experience—to allow the mind to fasten on some one great tangible proof of Divine superintendence, such as the fact that, in the Bible, ‘a series of more than thirty writers, speaking in succession along a vast line of time (sixteen hundred years), and absolutely without means of

concert, all combine unconsciously to one end; lock, like parts of a great machine, into one system; conspire to the unity of a very elaborate scheme, without being at all aware of what was to come after.' This one argument, when well worked out in the mind, becomes unanswerable; it places the Bible in a position altogether distinct from that of any *pretended* revelation; and, apart from all theories about the *mode*, justifies the assumption that its Divine Inspiration, and consequently its Divine Authority, is, in some sense or other, and in a very high sense too, *a great fact*.

Or, the question may be looked at in this way:—

Christ and His apostles everywhere take for granted the veracity of the OLD Testament Scriptures. They constantly appeal to these writings as authoritative and Divine. If, therefore, the NEW Testament be genuine; if such persons as Christ and His Apostles ever existed; and if the account given of them by the Evangelists be trustworthy, they *must*,—on the supposition that the *Old Testament* is unworthy of belief,—have been either deceivers or deceived.

In relation to the first supposition,—the possible non-existence of Christ, or the untrustworthiness of the Gospels—it is only necessary to observe that there is far stronger proof of the existence of Jesus Christ, than there is that such persons as Alexander or Julius Cæsar ever lived; that the Gospels are received as genuine for the same and much stronger reasons than those on which we receive the writings of Tacitus, or any other heathen author; and that the older infidel writers, such as Hobbes, Chubb, and Bolingbroke, readily grant this much at least. Lord Bolingbroke says: 'It is out of dispute that we have in our hands the Gospels of Matthew and John, who gave

themselves out for eye and ear witnesses of all that Christ did and taught.' *

In relation to the second,—that of Christ and His Apostles being either deceivers or deceived,—it is enough to say that if they were deceived, they were so in common with the entire Jewish Nation, which to this day maintains with scrupulous anxiety the *Divine* authority of its ancient records.

As to their being deceivers, *that* is absolutely incredible,—for their entire teaching is based on principles utterly inconsistent with such a supposition. Two of these 'pillars' of the Faith only need be named. The first, *fatal to all untruthfulness* of whatever kind, is, the utter worthlessness of the outward, when it does not truly represent the inward; the second, *fatal to mere ritualism and superstitious formality*, is, that men may have the noblest of all spiritual ancestry; may belong to the purest and best of churches; may form part of a community chosen by God Himself; and yet, if they are personally and practically insincere and unholy, it will avail them nothing. We say it is impossible *even to imagine* impostors inventing, or deluded fanatics promulgating, principles like these.

The Miracles of the New Testament must stand or fall with the *character* of Christ and His Apostles. Those of the Old,—allowing for possible interpolation,—with the veracity of the men who narrate them. The sacred writers are pledged to these marvels so deeply, that the overthrow of the *miraculous* element in either Testament involves of necessity the overthrow of the *moral* also.

Nor does the modern sceptical theory,—that these

* Bolingbroke's Works, vol. v. p. 91, 4th Edition; quoted by Mr. Horne. Crit. Int.

things, though false, are represented by the writers, in all *purity of intention*, as they conceived of them; that the words of the Bible may be (notwithstanding their falsity) regarded as *true* words, inasmuch as they express 'the conceptions of the times, and the measure of knowledge or of faith, to which every one of the writers, in his degree, had attained,'—at all mend the matter. For if this theory be true, the *authoritative* character of the Book is quite as effectually destroyed. If the miracles it records did not take place, the narrators, whether deluded or deluding, are altogether unworthy of respect.

No folly can be greater than to say that the words of Christ and His apostles when faithfully recorded were *true words*, if they were not really so; nay, if they were not inspired words in a very different sense from ordinary human utterances; for the speakers always *assume* this to be the case, and perpetually ground thereupon claims which, if unfounded, are either wicked or absurd. We may call such words fanatical, if we will; weak or blasphemous, if we must; but *true words* they can never be.

Nothing *can* be more unreasonable than to regard the Bible as being at once true, and yet full of falsehood; pure, and yet defiled by credulity and prejudice. As if a thing *really* of the heaven and heavenly, could be tainted by the breath of delusion and deceit. Eject the miraculous from the Bible and the Book unquestionably falls into contempt. If it be not authoritative and Divine, it is clearly not worth the trouble of perusing,—except, indeed, as a literary miracle, a monster of good and evil, which, having first slain the falsehoods of Paganism, now waits, in turn, to be devoured by higher truth, to which it has itself given birth and development.

Finally, it may not be amiss to think where the rejection

of the Bible lands us. With the Book, the God revealed in the Book departs also. What then remains for us? Clearly, neither more nor less than *self-worship*. The grosser forms of Paganism,—the cruel and revengeful demons of uncivilized idolaters,—would, in such a case, of course find no place amongst us. A more refined Polytheism might; but this is only the embodiment, in beautiful forms of idealized *human* power or passion, heroism or virtue. Pantheism, whenever it becomes objective, can take no other shape. For since *man* is greater than either sun or stars, storm or river, bird or beast, the *highest manifestation* of God, on this showing, must be MAN.

The *moral* results of such a conclusion are obvious. Every man, at his best, is, or aims to be, what he conceives his God to be. He may sink far below that conception, but he can never rise above it. Without a Divinity better than himself man is incapable of moral advancement.

Such are the necessary results of the rejection of Scripture, when fully worked out. To be a sceptic in the midst of Christian influences, and with the results of a Christian education continually acting on the character and conduct of a man, is one thing. To be a sceptic in the midst of universal scepticism, with all traces of Christianity withdrawn, and nothing left but *the results of unbelief*, is quite another thing. The *first*, notwithstanding its blind ingratitude, may consist with much that is amiable and honourable; the *last* must terminate in moral debasement, and in unmitigated selfishness.

We now only observe that abundant proof can be obtained,—That the various books which form the Bible embody all that God has been pleased to reveal of Himself to man; and further, that they have been transmitted to us without any *important* omissions or interpolations.

We say 'important,' because it cannot be disputed that, from whatever cause, errors *do* exist in the Bible. Sometimes figures are erroneous; and sometimes *words*. Sometimes a translation is not quite accurate, and what are called 'readings' of the text frequently vary. Interpolations are rare, but they may be found nevertheless.

The great question, however, is—What doctrine or important truth do these errors affect? Of what importance are they? Safely may it be replied, *of none at all*. As the Bishop of London has well remarked, 'When laborious ingenuity has exerted itself to collect a whole store of such difficulties, *suppose them to be real*, what on earth does it signify? They may quietly float away without our being able to solve them, if we bear in mind the acknowledged fact that there is a human element in the Bible.'

They are, however, certainly fatal to those who assert that not only is the word of God *in* the Bible, but the Bible *is itself*, in the strictest and fullest sense, in every particular of its contents, and in every expression which it uses, the infallible word of the one living and true God. This *cannot* be proved, and therefore ought not to be asserted. The treasure is in earthen vessels in more senses than one, and this simply because it is, on the whole, *best* that it should be so.

'The spiritual element in Scripture—that is, everything in it which concerns our relation to God and to eternity,—though combined with other elements, such as historical details, genealogies, and documents taken from the public registers, is *plainly distinguishable* from them, and wholly independent of them; and since the evidence of Christianity attaches infallibility only to the spiritual element, the discovery of errors in the Bible does not touch Christianity at all.'



CHAPTER VI.

WHAT IS MEANT BY INSPIRATION ?

“ Most wondrous Book! bright candle of the Lord!
Star of eternity! The only star
By which the bark of man can navigate
The sea of life, and gain the coast of bliss.
The only star which ever rose on Time,
And on its dark and troubled billows, still,
As generation, drifting swiftly by,
Succeedeth generation, throws a ray
Of heaven’s own light up to the hills of God.”

POLLOK.

INSPIRATION is the *immediate* communication of knowledge to the human mind, *for a special end*, by the Spirit of the Most High.

In this sense it was the peculiar privilege of those who were chosen of God to impart His will to mankind. It properly implies both reception and utterance; the capacity to receive, and the power to communicate Divine truth authoritatively and infallibly. It involves also a commission, and therefore an obligation, sometimes to speak, sometimes to write, sometimes, under providential guidance, to record faithfully (although not always without liability to error) a fact, a conversation, or a discourse; sometimes, under like conditions, to narrate a history; sometimes to compile and edit existing documents; sometimes to write letters, and sometimes to predict future events.

In the execution of such tasks, *infallibility* will doubtless belong to all that has been directly revealed from above; to all prediction founded thereupon, and to all that is communicated by special command; but not by any means of necessity to everything that has thus providentially been preserved from oblivion.

Whoever receives knowledge from above, in this *direct* way, is AN INSPIRED MAN.

It is because the Bible was written under these peculiar conditions that it is termed, with the strictest propriety, AN INSPIRED BOOK.

This original inspiration, however, is, as we have seen, not inconsistent with the presence of a human, and therefore fallible, element in the construction of Holy Writ; it does not exclude the possibility of the record being corrupted, either by copyists or in translation; it does not prevent occasional discrepancies, which, whether real or only apparent, man is unable to remove. But, we repeat, none of these things *ought* to shake in the slightest degree the most trustful confidence in the Book itself.

To suppose, as some seem to do, that God suggested every word of Scripture, dictated every expression, and so superintended its translation into the English tongue, that every text found in the Authorized Version is as much the word of God as if it had been directly uttered from heaven, is, to say the least of it, ignorant and absurd. A Bible, read under this impression, is inevitably *misread*, for Truth is, by this process, changed into a Superstition. Enough is it for us to know, that *whenever*, and *so far* as Divine assistance was needed in the preparation of Scripture, it was afforded.

In the preparation of the New Testament we cannot doubt that the Holy Spirit *brought all things to the remem-*

brance of the writers which the Divine Master had said or done; *guided them into all truth, and taught them all things* needful for the accomplishment of the work they had to do as the transmitters of the Divine will to future generations.

‘The moment we inspect these writings, we perceive in them the unmistakable traces of the Divine hand. We perceive it emphatically in a *tone* and manner which is incapable of imitation; in a singular absence of human emotion and mere human feeling; in a dignity and authority of address found nowhere else; in entire freedom from puerile details or legendary fables; in a most wonderful *abstinence* in the selection of materials; in the purest taste, and in the most noble simplicity of language.’ Everywhere these writings carry with them their own impress of authority.

In reading the New Testament it is as needful to remember that the first years of the Gospel dispensation were *miraculous*, as it is in reading the Old Testament to recollect that Judea was a *theocracy*.

In the neglect of this, many things recorded in the New Testament cannot be understood,—*e. g.*, passages which speak of *special gifts* of the Spirit for special work; whether of *language*, for missionary labour,—of *discernment*, for the discovery of the true and the detection of the false,—or the power of *inflicting punishment*, for the purification and discipline of the Church, as exemplified in ‘the rod’ of the apostle, and his deliverance of some ‘to Satan, for the destruction of the flesh, that the Spirit might be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus.’ These things are not to be explained away. They come before us *as facts* of Divine revelation, intended to illustrate the condition of the Church at the time to which they refer.

So also must it be distinctly kept in mind that Scripture, from its very nature, is *progressive*; that some things are now unintelligible to us, or, if not unintelligible, to some extent unprofitable, *only* because they belong to the distant past, and had reference mainly, if not exclusively, to the time when they were penned. Under this head may clearly be ranged the list of names in the First Book of Chronicles, and all the genealogies, whether in the Old Testament or in the New. Why need we shrink from saying that the time for verifying them is *gone by*, and that they never could have been of much practical value to any but to those who had the opportunity of comparing them with the public registers?

In like manner, the darkness which gathers around many of the prophecies is attributable solely to the fact that the time is not yet come for their full comprehension. This is as true of the Old Testament as it is of the New. *Both* contain predictions which, in all human probability, will only find their complete fulfilment under another economy, and after the resurrection.

Neither any nor all the difficulties so frequently paraded by the sceptic—although sometimes incapable, with our present lights, of satisfactory adjustment—are really of much moment; many of them are difficulties which press equally on natural religion and on the facts of life; and some of them at least supply satisfactory proof of the *honesty* of the writers, by establishing the absence of collusion. Those that are unremoveable teach at least this lesson, that God's ways are not as our ways, nor His thoughts as our thoughts,—that faith is but the highest reason, and that, as Pascal has beautifully observed, 'the last step of reason is to know that there is an infinitude of things which surpass it.'



CHAPTER VII.

ON THE BLINDNESS OF THE NATURAL MAN.

“Bread of our souls! whereon we feed;
True manna from on high!
Our guide and chart! wherein we read
Of realms beyond the sky;
Pole-star on Life's tempestuous deep!
Beacon! when doubts surround;
Compass! by which our course we keep;
Our deep-sea lead, to sound!”

BERNARD BARTON.

It is often said, and not always in a devout temper, that the Bible *differs* from all other books, not only by the fact of its inspiration, but—which is of still greater moment—by the circumstance that it can only be read with advantage by persons who have received *special* grace from heaven to enable them to understand it. To a man who has not this new and Divine faculty, whatever it may be, we are told all labour in relation to Scripture is vain, or, as it is usually expressed, that to such the book is *sealed*; since ‘the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned’ (1 Cor. ii. 14).

This statement, as it is generally put, involves two

things—a *truth* and an *error*. We shall endeavour to separate them.

The truth which underlies the statement, and which, be it observed, is by no means peculiar to the Bible, is this,—that *moral sympathy* is more or less essential to the full and accurate comprehension of any virtue or duty. A proud man cannot, properly speaking, *understand* the true character of humility, nor a churl the charm of liberality. They can *misunderstand* these virtues easily enough, counting the one contemptible and the other folly; but they cannot, in any enlarged sense of the word, *comprehend* either till they are in a state of mind to practise them. To say therefore, as so many do, in broad and general terms that an unrenewed man cannot understand the Bible *because* he is unrenewed, is not only foolish, it is false; for the statement, put in any form, is *only partially true*, and it is almost always grievously misunderstood. It is commonly supposed to imply a sort of *tacit* admission that such an one is very much to be pitied for his condition, and that perhaps he may not be altogether so responsible for it as is generally imagined.

The text we have quoted (1 Cor. ii. 14), which is the one always advanced in support of this supposed inability, has only to be regarded in connection with the train of reasoning of which it forms a part in order to see that the apostle has no such meaning as that attributed to him. He is not speaking of plain practical duties, such as repentance, or faith, or love to God, as if such obligations were incomprehensible to the natural man, but of deep Christian mysteries,—of ‘wisdom’ for ‘the perfect;’ ‘the wisdom of God in a mystery, even the hidden wisdom which God ordained before the world unto our glory,’ which ‘eye hath not seen, nor ear heard,’ but which God hath ‘revealed’ to

the apostles 'by His Spirit;' and it is *these things* which he says, and truly enough, 'the natural man receiveth not.'

But does it follow because a special spiritual condition is essential to the understanding of special spiritual mysteries, that therefore something more than belongs to man generally—something above and beyond what is given to the world—is essential to the understanding of God's message to all mankind? CERTAINLY NOT; and it is a delusion to imagine it.

The Bible, although bearing a special message to the believer, is not given to man as renewed, but *as a sinner*. It is indeed peculiarly addressed to 'the man of God,' that he may be thoroughly furnished thereby to every good work; but it has also a message to the thoughtless and ungodly. It is intended to show such an one what he needs, and to lead him, by prayer and supplication, to ask that he may obtain.

The mischief that is done by careless and unscriptural statements regarding Divine influence is incalculable, and never greater than when such views are made, as they constantly are, a ground of apology for *sinful* ignorance; as if it were the work of the Holy Spirit either to give a new *faculty* to the mind, or to furnish it with *new light*, without which its perpetual darkness is certain and irremediable. The 'fruit of the Spirit,' says St. Paul, 'is love, joy, peace longsuffering,' and such like; but where are we told that it is mental power, clearness of understanding, ability to comprehend, or, sad to say, as Dr. Chalmers has incautiously put it,—what the telescope is to the naked eye, or what reason is to an idiot?*

That *love*, in its result, is as *enlightening* as it is purifying, no one will dispute; for sympathy is the great quickener

* 'Tron Sermons.' Sermon i., pp. 28 and 35.

of the perceptions, and purity the chief refiner of the intellect; but it is a gross perversion of these sacred truths to reverse their lesson, by making a sovereign gift of God essential to a knowledge of any duty, for the non-exercise of which man is justly held to be responsible.

Do we then, it will be said, *deny* the work of the Spirit? Assuredly we do not. We but maintain that Divine light, *so far as it is needful to the comprehension of duty, and, therefore, to the completion of responsibility*, is already given to every man according to his position—*i. e.*, according to what will finally be required of him. What other intelligible meaning can be attached to our Lord's own words,—‘When He (the Comforter) is come, He will reprove (or convict) *the world* of sin, of righteousness, and of judgment?’ (John xvi. 7, 8). As well might we deny that ‘the Lord has risen,’ as affirm that the Spirit, in this sense, has not been given. Nor can we imagine in what part of Scripture a justification is to be found for the constantly recurring assertion that the Holy Spirit is given to, or withheld from the world, according to the faith or faithlessness, the earnestness or otherwise, of the intercessions of the Church.

So long as errors of this magnitude are, either directly or by implication, generally taught, it is obviously impossible that the Bible can be read as intelligently as any other book, or the most important part of every man's moral probation—the duty of seeking after truth as the supreme good, in the exercise of humility, candour, and patience—be fully acknowledged.



CHAPTER VIII.

ON SPECIAL LIGHT FROM HEAVEN.

“Thy word, O Lord, like gentle dews,
Falls soft on hearts that pine;
Lord, to Thy garden ne'er refuse
This heavenly balm of Thine;
Watered from Thee,
Let every tree
Bud forth and blossom to Thy praise,
And bear much fruit in after days.”

From the German.

THE notion of a *special light* being vouchsafed to the prayerful reader of Scripture is as *destructive of the Divine record* itself as it is of man's responsibility in rejecting it; for if God, by His Holy Spirit, communicates directly with the minds of men now, *as an Interpreter*, such communications will assuredly *control* any words given to mortals eighteen hundred years ago.

So men, who hold to this sort of Divine aid, are already beginning to reason. ‘Are we,’ it is now said—not by sceptics only, but by evangelical teachers,—‘to bring down the word inspiration to a use merely narrow and technical, asserting it only of prophecy and other Scripture writings, and carefully excluding from it all participation by ourselves, in whatever sense it might be taken?’ Are we to ‘become a class unprivileged, differing from the anointed

men of Scripture and Scripture times—shut down to a kind of second-hand life, feeding on their words?’ Is it to be believed that ‘*they* were inspired, while *we* in no sense can be? If so, there is no relief for us but in a recoil against inspiration itself, even that of the Holy Scriptures; for who will credit that men were inspired long ages ago, when now any such thing is incredible?’*

The *recoil* thus spoken of as inevitable, finds its expression in those later forms of criticism which are now issuing from our great seats of learning, according to which the inspiration of the first century is to bow before that of the nineteenth; the miraculous is to be expurgated; and if, as a necessary consequence, the Bible loses its authority, the result may be regretted, but it must be considered as inseparable from progress.

The *root* of these terrible errors, whether men will hear it or not, is the *notion* that the Holy Spirit *enlightens* the mind by other means than by the purification of the nature. This is evident from the ground taken by one of the leading writers in the ‘Essays and Reviews,’† who boldly asserts, not only that ‘inspiration is a permanent power in the Church,’ but that the Bible always supposes in its readers ‘*an illumination kindred to its own.*’ In explaining what he means, he quotes, as an authority, St. Basil, who speaks of the Holy Spirit ‘as an intellectual light, affording illumination to every *rational faculty* in the investigation of truth; the light which clears *mental*

* Dr. Horace Bushnell. (‘Sermons on the New Life,’ p. 46, American edition.) It is right to say that Dr. Bushnell adds, ‘Not that we are to assert or claim *the same* inspiration with the writers of Scripture. God has a particular kind of inspiration for every man, just according to what he is, and the uses He will make of him.’

† Dr. Rowland Williams, in ‘An Earnestly Respectful Letter to the Lord Bishop of St. David’s,’ 1860.

perplexities, and the secret energy through which every *organ* discharges its functions aright.' In the faith of this doctrine of the indwelling Spirit in the Church, it is asserted the creeds were developed, doctrine was drawn from doctrine, liturgies were collected, and Gentile customs were adopted.*

But what follows? Why, of course, this: that as 'the Comforter at present acts within the bounds of our capacities, leaving us liable to error, and the shortcomings of our generation,' so 'it is in harmony with the Divine dealings to suppose that while apostles and prophets enjoyed a larger measure of illumination, they, too, were left liable to shortcomings in knowledge, or humanity *in reasoning*.' The argument culminates in the question, 'What, then, is the authority of mere SCRIPTURALNESS *apart from what good men approve, and from what fair historians think credible?*' The answer implied is, Nothing at all.

Such are the consequences involved in a doctrine which is to this day cherished with the utmost tenderness by, we believe, all evangelical churches. The difference, on this point, between the Society of Friends and other Christians, is simply one of *degree*. The doctrine itself is held in common.

We lay it down then as a fixed principle, that he who would *understand* the Bible must believe, first, that God,

* This is not the doctrine of Scripture. The 'illumination' *there* supposed is a spiritual, not an intellectual gift. It is light proceeding from love. It is moral sympathy leading to the recognition of the Divine word. 'My sheep,' says Christ, '*know My voice*.' It is what John calls 'an unction from the Holy One,' by which Christians '*know all things*.' It is the 'verifying faculty' which is 'identified with the 'anointing' believers receive from Him who abideth in them. It is, in short, *reason* enlightened and sanctified by the Holy Spirit, and thus made capable of appreciating Divine truth when it is presented to the mind.

in giving it, has not withheld anything necessary for its comprehension, so far, at least, as *present duty* is concerned; secondly, that to seek to control the inspiration of prophets and apostles by any fancied inspiration of our own is a miserable delusion; and thirdly, that *as a consequence*, whether we approve or not, we must either feed on the words of men who wrote as they were moved by the Holy Ghost eighteen hundred years ago, or wither in our pride. And this not because 'the apostles and Scripture writers are set between us and God to fence us away,' but because the action of the Spirit of God on man, when not exercised miraculously, as at the planting of the Christian Church, and as in the case of the apostles and inspired writers of Scripture, is on the moral nature only, and *never directly* on the intellect; that the Holy Ghost enlightens, not by a process of addition, but by one of subtraction; not by giving to the intellect any light or power of which it would otherwise be deprived, but *by removing moral obstacles* to the free and healthy action of the natural faculties.

The contrary view, however spiritual or consoling it may seem, destroys all tangible distinctions between inspired and uninspired communications; favours mysticism; lowers the authority of the written Word; and justifies, so far as anything can do, *the most fanatical* interpretations of Scripture. For it is evident that if a man's understanding of Holy Writ depends on anything else than the right use of the faculties God has given him (which of course implies their non-perversion by dislike and prejudice), the Bible cannot be regarded as occupying the same position as any other book, but must be interpreted by a light which, try to explain it as we may, can never be more or less than *a personal inspiration*, in which case, as related to

any written document, such personal teachings must be *supreme*.

It is both curious and instructive to observe how error changes its form without changing its nature. It would really seem as if Protestants, like Romanists, believed that A DIVINE REVELATION, without AN INFALLIBLE INTERPRETER, was no revelation at all. Dr. Whately has well shown that this 'craving for infallibility, than which there is no more powerful principle in human nature,'—and of which the views we have combated in relation to the Holy Spirit are but one manifestation,—not only '*predisposes* men towards the pretensions, either of a supposed unerring church, or of those who claim or who promise immediate inspiration,' but becomes by consequence, as we have seen, the parent of no small amount of infidelity. It is an error 'that falls in at once with men's *wishes* and with their *conjectures*; it presents itself to them in the guise of a *virtuous humility*; and they readily and firmly believe it, not only *without* evidence, but *against* all evidence.'

Vain, however, is it to hope that by any such means we can evade our responsibility. What we really want is, that blessed indwelling of the Holy Spirit—the only influence we are authorized to seek and to pray for,—which is not intellectual, but moral; which is inseparable from candour, love of truth, and obedience generally; which manifests itself in growing sympathy with the Divine character; and which *therefore* involves clearer perceptions of, and a deeper insight into, the Divine mind and will, as exhibited in the Bible, than can be obtained in any other way. For, saith the Lord himself, 'If thine eye be single, thy whole body shall be full of light.'



CHAPTER IX.

ON DISTINGUISHING BETWEEN SCRIPTURE FACTS AND HUMAN INFERENCES.

“The bigot theologian has an art, —
A kind of hellish charm, that makes the lips
Of truth speak falsehood; to his liking turns
The meaning of his text; makes trifles seem
The marrow of salvation, and to a word,
A sect, a sound, gives value infinite.”

POLLOK.

THUS far we have treated the Bible simply as a *Book*, and altogether irrespective of the particular teaching it is supposed to contain. We now proceed to deal with impediments to its comprehension which spring up in our path *after* we have fully recognised the authority of the revelation, and are prepared to study Scripture as a Divine repository of Truth, intended for our practical guidance and spiritual advancement.

The first to which we would draw attention is that which arises from the confusions engendered by mixing together facts and inferences.

We are quite aware that an illustration or two will be needful to render the distinction we are drawing intelligible to ordinary readers; for popular attention has not been much directed to this point. Few are probably aware of the extent to which, in the exposition of Scripture, facts and inferences are blended; or how frequently, by

this process, that which is merely *human* is, by theologians, placed on a level with that which is Divine. Few remember, that while theology is 'the science of inferences,' the Bible is merely a revelation of facts.

But it is necessary, before proceeding further, to explain what we mean by a Scripture fact. And perhaps we cannot do this better than by calling attention to the following passage, which occurs in Robert Hall's well-known sermon on 'the glory of God in concealing a matter.'

These are his words:—'The revelation contained in the Scriptures extends only to FACTS; not to the theory of these facts, or their original causes. The most important truths are communicated in a dogmatic, not a theoretic manner. We are taught, on the testimony of Him who cannot lie, *insulated facts*, which we cannot connect with those reasons with which they are undoubtedly connected in the Divine mind. They rest solely on the basis of Divine authority; and we are left as much in the dark with respect to the mode of their existence as if they were not revealed.'

A SCRIPTURE FACT, then, is to us *a revealed truth*, dogmatically communicated; resting solely on the basis of the Divine authority; and viewed apart from any *reasons* for its proclamation, or any *deductions* which may be drawn from it. And this, be it observed, whether that which is revealed be *an event*, or whether it be what is usually termed *a doctrine*.

By AN INFERENCE we simply understand *a deduction* from some revealed truth. Such deduction may be right or may be wrong; for it is, at best, but the result of a process carried on by a finite mind, dealing with that which has relations to the Infinite.

The following examples will show what we mean:—

(1) '*Jesus looked round about, and saith unto His disciples, How hardly shall they that have riches enter into the kingdom of God!*' (Mark x. 23); using the term 'riches' apparently in a very extended sense, and applying it, probably, to all who, having full barns and provisions laid up for many days, were likely to forget their dependence on Him from whom they received their daily bread. This saying of our Lord's we call **THE DIVINE FACT**.

The apostles, 'astonished out of measure, said among themselves, Who then can be saved?' or, How few will be saved! That was **THE INFERENCE** they drew; and it seemed to them a necessary, nay, an unavoidable one.

The Lord practically replies, Your finite minds are not capable of dealing with matters which have relation to the future world, when He adds, '*With men* (or, according to the deductions of human reason from my words) *it*'—an extended salvation—'*is impossible, but not with God: for with God all things are possible*' (ver. 27).

(2) Jesus, according to the narrative of the evangelist (Matt. xxviii. 19), meeting the eleven on a mountain in Galilee soon after His resurrection, spake unto them, saying, '*All power is given unto Me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in* (or into) *the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.*' This is **THE SCRIPTURAL FACT**; and since 'all nations' meant the Gentiles (for their work among the Jews had for some time been going on), whosoever goes to heathen lands, or among any people where 'the Father' is not known, as revealed in 'the Son,' and ever present by 'the Holy Ghost,' and there teaches and baptizes his converts, obeys the injunction. He baptizes them into the belief of the one God, revealed as Father, Son, and

Holy Ghost; just as John baptized the Jew into the belief that Messiah was at hand; and as the apostles baptized both Jews and Gentiles into the belief in a triune Jehovah.

THE INFERENCE, now all but universally drawn from this fact, is, that therefore baptism is to be administered, either to infants, the children of Christian parents, who come into the world under the relationship in question (for, says the apostle, 'now,' *i. e.*, by their birth, 'are they holy;' meaning by the term, they are no longer in the condition of the heathen, 1 Cor. vii. 14); or to adults, on their profession of a supposed renewal of heart, indicated in a special *quickening of the spiritual life*, by virtue of which they claim to be recognised in a new capacity, that of living members of the living Head; the *theory* being that, until this change takes place, men, however virtuous, and however firmly believing in Divine revelation, are not, in the sight of God, *Christians*.

Now it is simply because the views of each party in the controversy between Baptists and Pædobaptists rest *merely on inference*, neither being able to furnish a single Scriptural example *in point*,* that division in relation to it has become permanent, and reconciliation hopeless.

* We say 'in point,' because the case of the three thousand at Pentecost—of Cornelius—of the jailer—or of the Ethiopian eunuch, are not so; all these being instances of baptism on conversion either from Judaism or heathenism. What we want, in order to settle the controversy, is an instance of the baptism, *either as child or adult*, of any person born of Christian parents. As the Sacred Records stretch through two generations, during which *thousands* of children must have been born and brought up in Christianity, it is, to say the least of it, singular, on the supposition that the rite was, *in their case*, essential to membership, and introductory to the Communion of the Lord's Supper, that not a single reference to its administration, either to child or adult, is to be found in the New Testament. Baptism, as administered in the Apostolic Age, was such a *public profession* of Christianity as involved

Who does not see that, if the question is made to rest entirely on Scripture, *it is quite possible* that both parties may be wrong; since, for anything that appears to the contrary, baptism might be intended to have relation *only* to persons, whether Jews or heathen, *entering* into the Christian Church, and so first recognising, *by a public act, with all its attendant risks*, their belief in God as their Father, revealed in Christ, and ever present by the Holy Spirit? That such a profession carried with it, as a matter of course, the baptism both of slaves and children, we do not for a moment doubt, since the household was then subjected to the head of it, and would be immediately brought under Christian instruction.

Surely, in a controversy carried on under such conditions, *forbearance* is a primary duty, and *candour* in judging others an imperative obligation. Far be it from us to imagine that God is displeased, either when parents dedicate their *children*, or adults *themselves*, to Him and to His Church by baptism with water; but surely it is highly offensive to Him for brethren in Christ to question each other's honesty, when conclusions adverse to their own, in relation to any such obligation, are arrived at.

(3) St. Peter teaches most distinctly that Christ '*hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God*' (1 Pet. iii. 18); that '*His own self bare*

liability to persecution for Christ's sake. It is so in India still. It is so amongst the Jews everywhere. A man unbaptized may be a Christian by conviction without suffering loss, so long as he does not make a public profession of it by baptism. Hence it is said, '*He that believeth, and is baptized, shall be saved.*' From some letters of the late Mr. Jay, of Bath, it appears that John Foster, the Essayist, although until his death a Baptist minister, took somewhat similar views to those we have stated. His most intimate friend (Mr. Hughes, of the Bible Society) says Foster never dispensed the ordinance of baptism, or attended the ministrations of it.

our sins in *His own body on the tree* ; that ‘*by His stripes we are healed*’ (ii. 24) ; while St. Paul, with equal distinctness, asserts that Christ ‘*redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us*’ (Gal. iii. 13) ; the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews, that ‘*without shedding of blood there is no remission*’ (ix. 22) ; and our Lord Himself, that ‘*the Son of man came to give His life a ransom for many*’ (Matt. xx. 28).

These are the great revealed FACTS on which the doctrine of the Atonement rests ; and happy is he who, receiving them in the spirit of a little child, believes and lives.

The INFERENCES ordinarily deduced are various, and commonly relate rather to *the philosophy* of the Atonement, than to the fact of its having been made.

They are such as these :—

(i.) God *could* not, in accordance with His *justice*, have accomplished the salvation of man in any other way.

(ii.) Christ propitiated God’s *wrath* by His blood.

(iii.) Christ was *punished* in order that Law might be satisfied, and so God be free to pardon,—and such like.

Now it is quite clear that these, and all similar *inferences*, whether right or wrong, are of little value compared with *the fact* to which they refer ; since a man may honestly hold *all* that Scripture reveals as to ‘the necessity’ of the sacrifice of Christ for the salvation of mankind,—all that is *really* included in such terms as ‘propitiation,’ ‘oblation,’ ‘satisfaction,’ and ‘sacrifice’ (so far as Scripture informs us what these terms include), without feeling himself at liberty to accept any one of the conclusions we have enumerated. Why, then, should I call my brother an unbeliever, if he is unwilling to admit the inferences I, perchance, may feel obliged to draw ? Why should I separate from him as heretical ?

True it is that *many*, when first awakened to a sense of the evil of sin, and to an apprehension of its penal consequences, can find peace only in such a contemplation of the cross of Christ as is involved in the thought that He, as the substitute for the sinner, *literally* bore the penalty of our transgressions. But this is rather the result of particular teaching, than the impression naturally left by Scripture. And if it be equally true, as it unquestionably is, that there are others who habitually dwell much more on the sad fact of their natural alienation from God, than on their exposure to His condemnation; who contemplate far more frequently the holiness and love of their heavenly Father, than His justice or His threatenings; and who, therefore, only see in Calvary *a transcendent mystery*, before which they bow with awe, who shall justify us in concluding that to such the Cross is of none effect? God forbid that we should consent, for a moment, to stake the great verity of man's redemption on any particular mode of explaining either the principle on which it rests, or the process by which it is accomplished.

(4) Christ explicitly declares, in the Gospel, that He has a Church given Him of God, for whom, exclusive of the world, He on one occasion prays (John xvii.); and St. Paul speaks distinctly of such persons as 'elect,' and '*chosen in Christ before the foundation of the world*' (Ephes. i. 3—5). These are SCRIPTURE FACTS; and to deny them is to fly in the face of the clearest revelation.

The INFERENCE deduced by some is, that God has 'fore-ordained the rest to dishonour and wrath, to be for their sin inflicted, to the praise of the glory of His justice.' (*Assemb. Cat. Q. 13*). By others, holding different views regarding human freedom, the conclusion is, that although 'all' are called, in a sense which leaves them without

excuse for not coming to Christ, only 'the elect,' or, as some would put it, 'few,' will be saved; since, however free the human will, the resistance of the depraved heart is never overcome except by *special* grace. In either case the inference, *being purely human*, is of small value; for who can tell whether both may not be altogether erroneous, and experience prove that the doctrine of Election perfectly harmonizes with a much more extended salvation? The truth is, that nothing short of a new revelation could substantiate half the conclusions of theologians.

But let us not be mistaken here. We are not denying the propriety of drawing inferences at all,—for the process is a mental necessity; reason itself must depart before we shall cease to deduce one truth from another. Neither are we seeking to support the extravagance of those who will not admit any doctrine to be Scriptural which is not expressed in Scripture language; for every one knows that a mere string of texts may be made to prove almost anything. We are simply urging the importance of separating *the fact*, whatever it may be, from the inference ordinarily deduced therefrom; and so of escaping the folly involved in giving to the one an authority which belongs only to the other. The one (the Scriptural fact), we hold to be Divine, and, therefore, authoritative; the other (the inference), however probable, is but human, and has, therefore, no right to lay claim to anything beyond *probability*. The inference may be more or less reasonable, and, therefore, more or less likely to be true; but it can never justly be urged upon any man's conscience as 'necessary to be believed.'

The opposite supposition forms the basis on which all the creeds, formularies, and confessions of Christendom build their huge pretensions. The Church of England and

the Church of Scotland, and we believe all the Continental Churches, alike hold that the articles of faith, which are to be regarded as 'requisite or necessary to salvation,' are not only 'what is *read* in Holy Scripture,' but 'what may be proved thereby.' The Church of England, therefore, binds her ministers to declare that the three creeds, 'the Nicene, the Athanasian, and that which is commonly called the Apostles' Creed, ought thoroughly to be received and believed' (Art. vi. and viii.); while the Church of Scotland, the Free Church, and Presbyterians generally, impose a Confession of Faith, the length, and breadth, and assumptions of which are perfectly astounding. The *reason* given for the imposition is the same in all cases, because '*they may be proved by most certain warrants of Holy Scripture.*'

We are, of course, writing only for Protestants, who hold, or profess to hold, in utter abhorrence the Romish notion that a Bible, even at the best, is but 'a vulgar and imperfect vehicle of truth; that doctrine is treasured up far more sacredly in the bosom of the priest, and far more safely dispensed by oral communication; that tradition must explain the New Testament; or that creeds possess an authority independent of the Scriptures.' And it is with this protest fully in view, that we lay it down as a cardinal rule in the study of the Bible, that Scripture facts, and inferences deduced therefrom, are never to be confounded; that Christian verities must always be carefully separated from theological propositions; that no human deduction from Scripture, however venerable by age, or however honoured by the support of great names, is ever to be insisted upon as if it were a matter of Divine Revelation; that Scripture truth, and human expositions of it, are on no account to be placed on the same level; that the

doctrines of God's Word must always be distinguished, by the broadest line of demarcation, from the commandments of men, however wise or good such commandments may be.

It was the neglect of this great principle which led to the formation of that vast system of logical theology which, like Romanism, has survived the wreck of empires, only to form the greatest of all obstacles to the union and peace of the Church of Christ; and to become a chief cause of the infidelity which now so frequently finds a home in the minds of speculative men.

To class our human interpretations of religious truth, our inferences from it, or our formulas in expressing it, with the great Revealed Facts on which such truth alone rests, is to sap the foundation of all intelligent belief, and to betray the Gospel with a kiss. It is so, because it confounds the essential with the unessential; makes both doubtful; and so destroys all hope of attaining to *certainty* in religious truth.

O God, who hast prepared for them that love Thee such good things as pass man's understanding; enable us so to distinguish between the teachings of the Divine Spirit, and the conclusions therefrom of sinful and erring men, that, abiding in the simplicity of the Gospel, we may be preserved from all error. Deliver us, we beseech Thee, from everything tending to weaken the supreme authority of Thy Holy Word; that so, resting evermore under the shadow of Thy wing, our souls may be kept in perfect peace, through Jesus Christ our Lord.



CHAPTER X.

ON BIAS, AS OCCASIONED BY UNDUE REVERENCE FOR GREAT OR GOOD MEN.

“Truth, truth is God’s ; He pours its blessed rays ;
Lavish of grace where sins and griefs abound :
Him only for the saving lustre praise,
Nor dread the mists which error’s path surround ;
Nor let our pride that dire eclipse foretell,
Which children of the night invoke and love so well.”

LAMARTINE—*Sheppard’s translation.*

BY the Bias of REVERENCE, we mean that which arises from an exaggerated regard for the many great men who have preceded us in the search for Truth, and whose conclusions have been received for ages as authoritative. These conclusions, in relation to Scripture, are, for the most part, embodied in the expositions of the Fathers, the Reformers, or the Puritans ; they are presented to us in every variety of shape in standard commentaries and other religious writings ; they are enforced, in one form or other, Sunday after Sunday, in the pulpits of almost every religious denomination.

An influence of this character is, from its very nature, all but overwhelming ; for it is wielded by men who have every claim on our sympathy and respect, and it presses upon us, like the atmosphere, from infancy to age, without disturbing our equanimity. To modest and humble inquirers, who distrust their own ability to judge, and

long for guidance, it is commonly irresistible; since submission to the decisions of others is by such always regarded as essential to piety. It is supported *from within* by delusions which have long separated lay responsibilities from those of the ministry; it is buttressed *from without* by indolence and carelessness; it is defended by the pretext that independent research might lead on the one hand to painful doubt, or on the other to irregular zeal. Priestcraft, wherever it exists, always encourages a state of mind favourable to the influence of authority; for its pretensions suppose that the people may advantageously be kept in a state of perpetual dependence.

To get rid of this bondage it is only necessary to trace it to its source. The moment we begin to do so our chains fall; for it then appears that with the same devotion with which we follow our pious forefathers, they in turn followed theirs; that the Puritans were really but the pupils of the Reformers; that the Reformers, while rejecting much that had been said and done by the Fathers, bowed with most surprising humility before the theological opinions of Augustine; and that Augustine, with all his genius and piety, was so far from being a safe guide, that he notoriously supported nearly every superstition of his time.

Having thus reduced, as we fairly may, the theological past—so far, at least, as it affects evangelical churches—to the authority of a single great mind, we must deal with Augustine precisely as Lord Bacon dealt with Aristotle; we must subject him *to fact*. In doing this, we shall quickly find that we have the same errors to encounter in theology that Lord Bacon had in philosophy, and that the remedy for the one is the only remedy for the other.

The *errors* in question are of two classes,—*first*, those

which belong to THE RELIGIOUS, which almost always sum themselves up in the declaration that all that *can* be known of Scripture *is* known; that nothing now remains to be discovered; and that since whatever is new cannot be true, independent inquiry is useless. The *second* belong to THE SCEPTICAL, who, proceeding to the other extreme, are ever proclaiming, in spite of abundant evidence to the contrary, that the little we think we know is untrustworthy; that the world is really in darkness both as to its past and its future; and that little or nothing worthy of a rational man's confidence can, by any possibility, be made out of the Bible.

The *remedy*, in each case, may find its expression (merely substituting Scripture for Nature) in the very words which Lord Bacon uses in reference to philosophy. 'Man,' he says, 'the servant and interpreter, can only understand and act aright in proportion as he *observes* or contemplates God's order; more he can neither know nor do.' His favourite phrase is, 'We must be content simply to stand before Nature and ask questions.' In like manner, the Christian must stand before *Scripture*, and feel that he can do little more than *observe* and carefully note *its facts*.* Whoever faithfully follows out such a method will soon find, in the words of the great father of modern philosophy, 'how wide is the difference between the *idols* of the human mind and the *ideas* of the Divine mind.'

But to do this it is absolutely necessary, first, to free ourselves from the vassalage of great names, and then to fear God and take courage. Our progress, when thus left alone to work out Truth, may be slow, but it is a comfort to be assured that it is certain of ultimate triumph. Yet not without difficulty. Whoever enters upon this course must lay his account with the endurance of no small share

* We have already fully explained the sense in which we use this word.

of obloquy ; he must be content to suffer for follies and pretensions not his own ; he must be willing to endure the very natural remonstrances of those who have spent their lives 'in reducing theology to order ;' and he must be prepared to meet the suspicion which inevitably falls upon every man who is bold enough to disregard the force of prevailing prejudices.

We do not of course pretend that any one *can* now read the Bible as if it had dropt but yesterday from the clouds ; nor do we think it desirable that he should do so, even were it practicable. We are not among those who despise the opinions of the wise and good, either of our own or of past times. We rate the laborious researches of many of our commentators, both ancient and modern, at a value above all price. So far as these labourers have tended to promote purity in the text, or thrown light on any matter calculated to render that text better understood, no gratitude can be too deep to be awarded to them. It is with their *inferences* alone we quarrel ; and above all, with the dogmatism which would force these inferences on mankind, as if they had a right to stand side by side with Inspired Truth.

It is the opinion of many, that a new and far more extensive reformation than that which was accomplished in the Sixteenth Century is at hand. If it be so, the best preparation we can make for its approach will be found in the extension *to Truth* of that deeper sense of responsibility which has of late years come over us in relation *to Life* ; in a growing conviction that he who is 'of the truth' only rightly hears Christ's voice ; and by a corresponding assurance that truth cannot be reached by any process short of a laborious, self-denying, and independent search for it, in the spirit of the martyr, and under the purifying influence of the Holiest in the heart.



CHAPTER XI.

ON BIAS, AS ARISING FROM THE AFFECTIONS.

“The cheerful supper done, wi’ serious face
They, round the ingle, form a circle wide ;
The Sire turns o’er, wi’ patriarchal grace,
The big ha’ Bible, ance his father’s pride :
His bonnet rev’rently is laid aside,
His lyart haffets wearing thin an’ bare :
Those strains that once did sweet in Zion glide,
He wales a portion with judicious care ;
And, ‘ Let us worship God,’ he says, with solemn air.
ROBERT BURNS.

By the Bias of AFFECTION we understand that impulse in any given direction which the mind has received, either from early education and training, or from associations connected with the first steps of the spiritual life.

We by no means regard such bias as *in itself* an evil. We are far from denying that truth is, to all of us, a prejudice before it is a personal conviction. We think *with children* it ought to be so. But only during childhood. The passive must in due time be exchanged for the active, and the objective form must become a subjective reality, or that which has been received, however humbly, will not prove of much service in the struggle of life, or be found to stand firm when exposed to the pressure of temptation or doubt. This is emphatically true of Scripture, which must

be 'inwardly digested,' as well as read, before it can come to be a part of ourselves, or, like food, strengthen and sustain us.

At this stage it is that the Bias of Affection often operates unfavourably. It seems to many of us such a sacrilege to cast aside *anything* that has been sown in our hearts by the bedside of our infancy, and watered by the tears of those whom we can never again behold on earth, that we naturally shrink from undertaking any investigation which we foresee *may* perhaps lead to the breaking up of associations so inexpressibly precious to us. And yet, as we all admit, it must frequently be done before truth can become a reality, or faith in God a living power. It is in such cases that we are made to feel the force of the declaration, 'he that loveth father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me.'

Care, however, must always be taken to avoid the influence of mere *reaction*. Many a man who has been religiously,—perhaps we should rather say *strictly* brought up,—when he becomes free from parental or other control, flies to an opposite extreme of theological opinion, sometimes for no better reason than because it *is* opposite. He has seen, it may be, weakness and inconsistency associated with certain professions,—perhaps even dominant selfishness or flagrant hypocrisy,—and so he flings himself off to the greatest possible distance from all his early associations, and thinks that in so doing he is acting wisely and honestly. But this by no means follows. He may be doing the very reverse. He is certainly guilty of folly, and probably of sin, in forsaking the faith of his fathers, if he has no better reason for doing so than a vain desire to manifest independence of thought, or mere disgust at what he may consider vulgarity or insincerity in some of those who belong to it.

Principles are not to be so dealt with. Right and wrong, truth and error, are not questions of taste, or interest, or conventional convenience, but solemn realities, on faithfulness to which character both for time and eternity frequently depends. In avoiding *Scylla*, therefore, in this matter, let us beware of *Charybdis*.

But early instruction is by no means the only form in which human affection is apt to bias the views we take of Divine Truth. 'A man,' says a recent writer, 'may have been converted from a sinful life by hearing an Evangelical preacher, or by intercourse with an Anglo-Catholic priest. He is filled with gratitude and enthusiasm, and is eager to communicate to others the blessing he has received. He attributes his conversion to the particular phase of revealed truth which was brought before his own mind,—whether it be a strong feeling of the heinousness of sin, and the doctrine of salvation through the Atonement, or whether it be union with Christ through the blessing of the sacraments and the Church. Believing himself to be saved by the influence of these doctrines, he naturally dwells on them almost exclusively, sees them everywhere in the Bible, is blind comparatively to other portions. Hence his bias in interpreting the document which gives him a title to the kingdom of heaven.' 'This,' says he, 'I am persuaded, is one principal cause why very earnest men take such different views of the interpretation of God's word,—pure gratitude for salvation received.'* Add to this, affection *for the individual* by and through whom the Gospel has been imparted, and love *for the religious community* with which the new convert has been brought into connection,—involving, as it almost invariably does, participation in its prejudices and party spirit,—and we shall then perhaps be

* "Idealism Considered," by the Rev. Wm. Gresley.

able to perceive the vastness of the hindrance thus cast in the way of candid inquiry.

But is there no remedy for this? We think there is,—in the recollection that in all matters of truth and duty the human must bow before the Divine; that God uses all kinds of instrumentality, from the Romish priest to the city missionary, and every shade of doctrine, from the highest Calvinism to the lowest Arminianism, to bring sinners to Himself; and that *therefore* no authority whatever in favour of any particular agency or doctrine can properly be drawn from the mere fact that God has made use of it for the conversion or spiritual awakening of the children of men.

Agencies and particular doctrines,—regarded as forms of thought, and separated, as such things easily may be, from that which is 'Spirit and Life,'—are at best but *instruments* through which attention is arrested, thought excited, and reflection deepened.

TRUTH, as the pabulum of the soul, and GRACE, as the gift of God to sinful man, are above them all.

Lord of all grace, purify, we beseech Thee, our hearts by Faith which is in Christ Jesus; and so cleanse us from all evil, that everything which beclouds and hinders the simple reception of Thy Truth may be put far from us; and the fruits of the Spirit being made manifest in our life and conversation, our eyes may be opened to discern wondrous things out of Thy law.



CHAPTER XII.

ON BIAS, AS ARISING FROM PERSONAL AND ECCLESIASTICAL INTERESTS.

“By what unseen, and unsuspected arts,
The serpent, Error, twines round human hearts.”

COWPER.

THE Bias of INTEREST is so much meaner in its nature than that of affection, and so much less worthy of respect than that which arises from reverence for great men and past ages, that, however powerful its influence, people rarely acknowledge themselves to be under its sway. And yet without attributing any special baseness, who can deny that, *as a fact*, ‘the interpretation of Scripture *has* got mixed up with worldly interests and parties, and passions and feeling, and *is* influenced as much by these causes as the view taken by Radicals or Conservatives of an Act of Parliament, or of an historical document, is influenced by their respective opinions.’

To suppose that such influences act only in connection with national establishments and permanent endowments, is simply absurd. The *property* of voluntary associations, as secured by trust-deeds; *income*, likely to be withheld on any material change of sentiment; *status* in a sect; *trade* derived from a congregation; *professional connections*, and possible alliances,—all have their weight,—sometimes in deciding the *choice* a man makes of his spiritual home,

and much more frequently in *preventing the adoption* of opinions likely to be offensive, or even distasteful, to others.

Such are the terrible hindrances from BIAS, which now stand in the way of a full and fair investigation as to what is, or is not, religious truth.

But are we, then, to conclude that to interpret Scripture like any other book is simply impossible; that every man who is of age to set about such a work, must *of necessity* do so either under the dominant influence of authority or interest, or else in blind subjection to the prejudices of his birth and education? By no means. The same *forms* of truth may not indeed adapt themselves to all classes of minds. They never have done so yet, and they probably never will. It *may be*, for aught we know, undesirable that they should. But of this we may be assured, that when it pleased God to make known his mind and will to man by and through a book, he meant that book to be understood; that if it is not understood, the fault is ours, and not His; that the hindrances to its comprehension are moral and not intellectual; and that it is impossible for us to say to what extent unity of judgment in relation to its teachings *might* be realized were men but honestly disposed to study its contents with no other object than to ascertain *what it says*.

Eternal Spirit! who alone canst enable us rightly to apply Thy Holy Word, grant that we may derive from it those lessons only which Thou didst intend it to impart; that so, being preserved from all the errors and inventions of men, we may evermore walk in Thy light, through Jesus Christ our Lord.



CHAPTER XIII.

ON WHAT IS OFTEN CALLED, READING THE BIBLE FOR 'EDIFICATION.'

“ In the troubles of Earth's exile
Thou dost peace and joy afford ;
Holy Volume ! which revealest
Each kind promise of my Lord ;
Light and guide in toils and dangers,
Balm of sadness, healing Word.”

From the Italian—Sheppard's Translation.

THE late Dr. Maitland, in an ingenious essay on impediments to the right understanding of Scripture, introduces a man of business, who, with a certain sort of self-satisfaction, apologizes for his own shortcomings thus,—‘I am a plain Christian, worried with the cares of my business and family, and glad to catch half an hour to read my Bible. I must make the most of it. I must employ the little leisure I can snatch at intervals in *devotional* reading, and *my* object must be my own edification.’

The reply made to him is,—‘To be sure, you must read for your edification ; but what is the distinction which you seem to draw between reading for your edification, and reading with a view to learn all that God offers to teach ?’

He answers,—‘Why, I mean that I must read the Scriptures with *application to myself*, to my *own circumstances*, to my *own soul*. If I come to a part which I do not understand, I have not time and learning to investigate its meaning ; and when I attempt it, I often find that the

time, which should have been employed in devotion, has been wasted in turning over commentators, from whom, after all, I get, perhaps, no satisfaction as to the real meaning of the passage, though some of the more pious and practical among them may assist me in applying it to myself. Now, if I do not thus derive a *personal application to myself*, what use is there in my reading such a part of Scripture at all ?'

The rejoinder which follows—and it expresses the one great lesson we are anxious to impress in the present chapter, is this:—'To speak plainly, I do not know that, with your views and ideas, there is much use in your reading such a part of Scripture, because, as soon as you have found that you cannot understand it, or make it apply to yourself as it stands, you set to work to make some meaning which you do not yourself believe to be the real meaning, and to fetch out some doctrine or precept which the text does not contain; and this habit is so prejudicial, that I believe it would be better for you only to read such parts as you cannot doubt do really apply to your own circumstances. It is not likely that you will reap any benefit from reading the rest of the Scriptures, sufficient to counterbalance the injury which must arise from the habit of setting aside all inquiry as to the real meaning of the Word of God, and fancying that any imaginations of your own are more profitable than the mind of the Spirit.'

If this method of treating Scripture—so graphically described—be common, and we fear it is, we may cease to wonder that so much of God's Word is unintelligible to the general reader. *Any book*, thus handled, must necessarily become so; for the moment we allow ourselves to read with any other aim than to understand the meaning of the

writer, we darken that which is before us so thoroughly, that it is all but hopeless to expect it can ever become clear.

In reading Scripture, we are *bound*, and that most emphatically,—no less by reverence for its Author than by integrity of heart, to ask but one question,—‘*What does it say?*’ And if, to get this question answered, it is necessary to ascertain not only what the precise words are, but when and to whom they were spoken,—to observe the connection in which they stand, and to note the circumstances under which they were uttered, we must neither grudge the labour that may be involved, nor imagine that we can evade its necessity by indulging in our own fancies, however ingenious they may be, or by prolonging mere meditation, however spiritual or devout. When the *true meaning* of a passage is made out, and *not till then*, shall we be able to *apply* it with simplicity of purpose, or receive and realize as living words that which has been written or spoken.

In doing this, a thoughtful and intelligent reader will gladly avail himself of such helps as he can obtain. For the meaning of words, he will pay attention to the *marginal* readings given in the Authorized Version; he will consult intelligent commentators; he may, perhaps, think it worth while to learn enough Greek to enable him to study such ‘Notes’ as those of Dean Alford.

For the rest, *ordinary sagacity* will generally suffice. The Bible always takes for granted that readers are possessed of *common sense*; that they will give the same kind and amount of *attention* to inspired statements which they are in the habit of bestowing on ordinary writings; and that they will read its communications continuously, and *as a whole*.



CHAPTER XIV.

ON READING TO ASCERTAIN THE SENSE.

“The Bible! that’s the Book. The Book indeed,
The Book of books;
On which, who looks,
As he should do, aright, shall never need
Wish for a better light
To guide him in the night.”

GEORGE HERBERT.

No one who has not tried the experiment, can imagine what a flood of light falls upon a Pauline Epistle, when it is *read through at one sitting*, with quickened attention to its scope and purpose. In no other way can we perceive its lights and shadows, its tone and perspective, or *get above* the one-sided interpretations which are continually thrust upon us both from the press and the pulpit. And that which is true of the Epistles, is true also in relation to other parts of the Divine Record.

Instead of treating Scripture in this way,—supplicating the Holy Spirit for a right state of *heart*, and in harmony with that supplication, struggling manfully against the impulses of prejudice and pride,—too many never read the Bible at all, excepting under the limitations imposed by chapter and verse; and then, for the most part, with an utter disregard of the connection subsisting between that which they peruse, and that which they omit. Prayer for

Divine Light seems, to such persons, all that is required in order to arrive at truth, however idle, or uncandid, or bigoted they may be.

The tendency which *textual preaching* has to foster this habit of reading Scripture merely in disjointed fragments, has frequently been adverted upon. We are now, however, only speaking of the *private* reading of the Word; and in relation to this, we say deliberately that, if we would be *honest* before God,—if we would shrink with righteous susceptibility from sacrificing a true thought, in order to gain thereby the use of *mere words* in favour of some doctrine or practice to which they were never intended to apply,—we shall feel that nothing can justify the use of any portion of God's Word apart from a consideration of the context, or in a sense different from that which it bears in the portion of the record from which it is taken.

It is this carelessness about Truth in the application of Scripture that has made the Fathers, with all their eloquence and piety, such untrustworthy interpreters. It is this which compels us, in perusing their writings, to *pause and doubt*; since passing events, party interests, or the hope of polemical triumphs, were, to them, a continual excuse for the most outrageous violations of the original meaning of the Inspired Volume. It is this which forces from us the exclamation,—‘The *words* that are used are the words of the Prophet or the Evangelist, but the preacher stands behind them and adapts them to his own purposes.’

Hence it is that patristic writers so often support a great cause ‘in a spirit alien to its own;’ sometimes adopting arguments that are unchristian in their ultimate grounds; sometimes ‘resting upon errors the refutation of errors;’ and sometimes ‘drawing upon the armouries of darkness for weapons that, to be durable, ought to have been of celes-

tial temper;’ *now*, it may be, trespassing against ‘affections which furnish to Christianity its moving powers;’ and *now* against ‘truths which furnish to Christianity its guiding lights.’ On behalf of God ‘they often seem determined to be wiser than God; and, in demonstration of spiritual power, they do not scruple to advance doctrines which the Scriptures have nowhere warranted.’* The issue of it all was,—THE ROMISH APOSTACY.

The dangers of the present day are not so very dissimilar as they may at first sight appear. It is chiefly through *misapplications* of inspired words, that so many are now led to choose startling rather than Scriptural modes of doing good; sometimes to adopt language, both in prayer and preaching, which would almost seem to imply that the speaker loves the ignorant and the wretched more than Christ does; and sometimes to talk as if they forgot that the most enlightened spiritual convictions are those which are most habitually held in submission to our Maker, and which are least tinged by self-seeking or display. Nor is the fear groundless that, in proportion as the Church sanctions any kind of extravagance in the use of Scripture, will the ground of faith itself be nullified; certainty in Bible interpretation be destroyed; and arbitrary principles be established, which must eventually lead either to ignorant credulity or to universal scepticism.

We lay it down, therefore, as a rule which should never be violated, that he who would understand his Bible must beware of throwing false associations around true words, or of *applying* the truths of Revelation in any way not in harmony with the aim and object of the Revealer.

* De Quincey and Dr. Jowett’s Essay.



CHAPTER XV.

ON THE ACCOMMODATION OF SCRIPTURE.

“ Word of the holy and the just !
To leave thee pure our Fathers bled ;
Thou art to us a sacred trust,
A relic of the martyr dead !
Among the valleys where they fell,
The ashes of our Fathers sleep ;
May we, who round them safely dwell,
Pure as themselves the record keep.”

Anon.

THAT accommodations of Scripture are, *to a certain extent*, sanctioned both by our Lord and His Apostles, cannot be questioned ; yet, be it observed, always under conditions which prevent misconception. In no instance that we are aware of, does a quotation made on inspired authority darken the primary or literal meaning ; on the contrary, in most cases, a clear and distinct recognition of the original sense is involved ; and in *all*, the citation, whether allusive, or illustrative, or intended to indicate parallel circumstances, is simple and natural.

Hindrances are occasioned whenever the *words* of Scripture are so used as to cloud their true meaning ; when the reader, instead of being enlightened, is *misled* by biblical quotation ; and when the mind of the Spirit, though professedly expressed, is really neglected or perverted.

Such is unquestionably the case when texts intended for one purpose are applied to another ; when the messages

of the Prophets to Israel of old are *read* as if they were addressed to the men of this generation ; when warnings of *temporal* calamity are silently changed into threatenings of eternal woe ; when promises of *earthly* good are transformed into predictions of spiritual blessing ; and when Christ is supposed to be referred to, in passages which clearly indicate that no such thought was in the mind of the inspired speaker or writer.

The examples we propose to give must be regarded only as *specimens of a class* ; they are furnished chiefly for the purpose of illustration.

(1) '*Prepare to meet thy God*' (Amos iv. 12) is frequently used in public discourse as if the Prophet, in these words, called upon all men to prepare for death and judgment. Yet this is not the fact. The sacred writer is not referring to death at all, but to the temporal judgments which God had inflicted, and threatens still to inflict, on the rebellious Israelites. The passage that *ought* to be quoted for the warning of the ungodly is Acts xvii. 31, since this is unquestionably addressed to such persons, and is, moreover, a distinct revelation of the New Testament.

(2) '*The harvest is past, the summer is ended, and we are not saved*' (Jer. viii. 20). This text is constantly quoted as if it implied that for the parties spoken of the day of grace was past ; and then the words that immediately follow,—'*Is there no balm in Gilead ; is there no physician there ?*' are regarded as prophetic of Christ. Yet, taken as they stand, and in connection with the circumstances under which they were uttered, they simply mean, 'One year after another,—one campaign after another,—passes, and we are not saved from the enemy.' (*Matt. Henry.*)

(3) ‘*Thine eyes shall see the king in his beauty : they shall behold the land that is very far off*’ (Isa. xxxiii. 17). How often have these words been whispered in the ear of the dying believer, in the sense of a promise that he shall soon see Christ, and find rest in heaven. And yet (like 1 Cor. ii. 9) it has no such reference. The true meaning is, ‘The king (Hezekiah) shall put off his sackcloth, and shall appear in his beautiful and royal robes; and, the siege being raised, they (the people) shall go abroad, the empire of Hezekiah shall be extended, and distant parts be thrown open to them.’ (*Henry, Lowth, Boothroyd, and others.*) It is quite true that the Christian looks forward to a period when his eyes shall see Christ, his King, in His beauty, and enjoy a bliss greater than eye hath seen, or ear heard, or the heart of man conceived; yet nothing can excuse the *perversion* of texts, in order to express a truth capable of being well supported by legitimate means.

(4) ‘*And Gallio cared for none of those things*’ (Acts xviii. 17). This passage is frequently expounded as if it meant that the Deputy of Achaia was a man equally regardless of right or wrong,—too indolent or careless to take the trouble even to be just. The reverse is, however, the fact. It was because he was an upright Roman magistrate, and felt that his jurisdiction did not extend to questions relating to the Jewish law, that he refused to allow himself to be mixed up with the senseless prejudices and passions of an excited mob. To call a man, who is careless about spiritual things, a Gallio, is as absurd as it is misleading.

We have very recently heard of a sermon having been preached, on the death of a most excellent chief pastor of the Church of England, from this text, ‘*And his Bishopric let another take*’ (Acts i. 20), in utter forgetfulness that it

applied to Judas; and also of a popular Romanist writer having defended the rapid utterance of 'Masses' by the Catholic Clergy from the passage, '*That thou doest, do quickly*' (John xiii. 27). Absurdities like these seem scarcely credible, and yet there is no limit to them if once we allow ourselves to be guided by sound, rather than by sense.

We quote two more instances in point,—

(1) '*I have trodden the wine-press alone; and of the people there was none with me*' (Isa. lxiii. 3). This passage, in consequence of its frequent accommodation, is commonly understood to refer to the *sufferings* of the Saviour. Bishop Heber, and other hymn writers, use it in this sense, as if they were quite unconscious of its true meaning. And yet the slightest attention to the context will show that it really refers to Christ coming in triumph, to take vengeance on His enemies. No other meaning can be attached to it, except by stopping in the middle of a verse. The text, as a whole, thus reads,—'I will tread *them*' (not be trodden upon by them) 'in mine anger, and trample them in my fury; and their blood shall be sprinkled on my garments, and I will stain all my raiment. For the day of vengeance is in mine heart, and the year of my redeemed is come' (ver. 3, 4). Compare with this passage Rom. xvi. 20; Rev. xiv. 19; and xix. 11—13, and all is plain.

(2) '*The whole head is sick, and the whole heart faint. From the sole of the foot even unto the head there is no soundness in it; but wounds, and bruises, and putrefying sores*' (Isa. i. 5, 6), is a text constantly used in prayer to express the doctrine of the depravity of human nature. The slightest attention to the context would suffice to show that the words in question simply refer to the condition of Israel *as stricken by punishment*. She is compared to one who has been beaten from head to foot.

Again, 'An inference or a lesson may be very Scriptural, and yet not justly derived from the text we quote for it. When Ehud said to Eglon, 'I have a message from God unto thee' (Judg. iii. 20), he uttered some striking words; but his message was a dagger, and his intention murder. Is a minister justified in making these words the text of a Gospel sermon? We think not; because Ehud told a falsehood, whereas the preacher tells truth, and comes with a message of love for men's salvation.

Further, 'In the words of a verse in the Prayer-book Version of the Psalms, Christians often pray that they may be 'like giants refreshed with new wine.' The expression (Psa. lxxviii. 65) is a bold simile, applied, not to man, but to the Lord,—refers to His wrath upon His enemies, and suggests no Christian grace whatever.'

Is it needful to say that such a method of quoting Scripture,—in accordance, not with truth, but with our own preconceived notions,—is every way misleading and mischievous? Is it not clothing our human thought in a Divine garment, and then demanding for it an authority to which it has no claim? Never should it be forgotten that Scripture is *Inspired Truth* only in the sense in which it was originally given; in no other form whatever can it, with any propriety, be termed the Word of God.

On this subject, the late Dr. Pye Smith has some admirable observations in his 'Principles of Interpretation.' Speaking of the evils which arise from thus accommodating Scripture, he observes,—'It may be said, indeed, that the citation is merely made in the same way in which men often quote a line of poetry, and apply it to any new occasion. Yet it should be recollected, that in so applying a fine passage of Virgil or Milton, for instance, we can do no harm; we can lead no man into error by it;

the new application is never supposed to have been the original intention of the author. But since the Scriptures are the repository of God's Revelation, it is evidently a far more serious matter for us to quote Scriptural passages, even in an incidental way. *It is almost certain* that most hearers and readers will imagine, that the transient citation or allusion is mentioned *as evidence* in the particular respect for which it is adduced.

'The habit of quoting passages of Scripture in ways which imply a meaning and application exceedingly remote from their genuine design *is not a trifling evil*. It is pregnant with injuries to the cause of Scriptural knowledge and practical edification. It encourages among Christians a widely prevailing practice of reading the Scriptures with little attention, and of applying detached passages in sentences entirely foreign to their proper meaning.'

Let the object we have in view in writing these chapters be steadily kept in mind,—the promotion of a more intelligent reading of Holy Scripture, by pointing out and seeking to remove the various hindrances which at present interfere with our so doing,—and it will be seen at once that the 'accommodations' of which we complain, whatever may be the intentions of those who make and defend them, do really 'darken counsel,' and so far tend to destroy the Divine testimony. Read with the impressions produced by such expositions as those we have referred to, the Bible instead of being *felt* to be, as it really is, the most *interesting* book ever penned, becomes to the reader dull, because *made dark*; and hard to understand, because treated as if it were a mere collection of disjointed fragments, to be interpreted by the aid of devout fancy or spiritual caprice.



CHAPTER XVI.

ON PERVERSIONS BY PROJECTION.

“ A critic on the Sacred Book should be
Candid and learn'd, dispassionate and free :
Free from the wayward bias bigots feel,
From fancy's influence, and intemp'rate zeal.”

COWPER.

WE regard Scripture as *projected*, when passages which relate to the Apostles only, or to the miraculous state of things which obtained during the planting of the Christian Church, are used *as if they were intended* to apply to ourselves, or, at least, to institutions which had no existence when the words in question were uttered. That Scripture, when subjected to this process, becomes *perverted*, will be seen clearly enough when particular instances are brought under examination.

A few only can here be cited.

(1) ‘ *Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God* ’ (John iii. 5). The application of this text to *Christian* baptism is by no means uncommon ; some maintaining therefrom the absolute necessity of *baptism by water* to salvation, while others, who shrink from the consequences involved in this conclusion, affirm that through baptism alone can any man become a member of Christ's Church, or a partaker of ‘ covenanted ’ blessing.

Yet nothing can be clearer than that when these words were uttered, *Christian* baptism was unknown; that they refer *exclusively* to the baptism of John; and that the lesson they were intended to teach was, that Christ must be openly acknowledged, as well as inwardly believed in; that confession before man, whatever reproach or danger might thereby be incurred, was essential to discipleship; and that the conduct of Nicodemus, and that of the class he represented (for he came as a representative man), was incompatible with fidelity (Luke vii. 30; John xii. 42, 43).

(2) ‘*Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink His blood, ye have no life in you*’ (John vi. 53). These words, with others that precede and follow, are ordinarily regarded as applying to the ‘Holy Communion;’ some (as the Romanists) founding thereupon, in connection with the later Institute of the Redeemer, the doctrine of Transubstantiation; and others (as the High Lutherans) that of Consubstantiation.

Where, however, we may well ask, is the connection to be traced between the conversation here recorded, and the subsequent appointment of the Lord’s Supper? As no such ordinance *then* existed, it is utterly impossible that those who heard Christ speak *could* have imagined anything of the kind. Nor does his teaching imply it. The comparison our Lord draws is between ‘the meat which perisheth’ (ver. 27), and that ‘which endureth to everlasting life’ (ver. 49, 50); and the lesson imparted would have been just as important and intelligible as it now is, had the Eucharist never been instituted. It was the revelation of that new and wondrous Life,—‘life unto life,’ which, greater than the life He gives ‘unto the world,’ they, and they only, enjoy, who become *here* spiritually

united to the Redeemer by a living faith, and to whom His flesh and His blood,—His life and His death,—are as ‘manna’ to support, and as ‘wine’ to gladden and refresh. This doctrine naturally appeared to many of the disciples—then very imperfectly acquainted with His nature and dignity—so monstrous, that they could not bear the saying, but ‘went back, and walked no more with Him’ (ver. 66).

To pretend, as some have done, in order to support High Sacramentarianism, that those who went away were *revolted* at what they considered a sort of cannibalism, is either dishonesty, or *unmitigated folly*. The Jews were conversant with the imagery Christ employed (Ezek. iii. 1—3), and *could* not, therefore, mistake His meaning; the response of Peter clearly shows that the Twelve understood Him aright, for when asked, ‘Will ye also go away?’ they reply at once, ‘To whom shall we go? Thou hast *the words* of eternal life’ (ver. 68). He had Himself just told them, ‘The flesh profiteth nothing; the words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life’ (ver. 63). We ourselves colloquially employ very similar language when we bid men not only ‘mark and learn,’ but ‘inwardly *digest*’ Divine truth.

There seems to us nothing whatever in the text to justify *even the association* of this discourse with the Supper, however strongly that institution may recall and illustrate its teaching. *Projection* here leads inevitably to *perversion*.

(3) ‘*The prayer of faith shall save the sick*’ (Jas. v. 15). There can be no doubt that this text is often regarded as *a promise*; that expectations of the recovery of sick persons are frequently founded upon it; and that, when disappointment follows, a painful sense of doubt comes over the soul, although concealed, as much as possible, by

exclamations on the inscrutable and mysterious providence of God.

But is it given *to us as a promise*? Certainly not. The context clearly shows that it applies only to *a certain class of sick*—those who were *judicially* punished by sickness for special sin. The reference to Elias, as having by his prayer brought rain, is alone *proof* that a special, and not an ordinary state of things, was in the mind of the Apostle.

Hezekiah certainly had his life lengthened in answer to his prayer; but the whole transaction was peculiar, and connected with the Theocracy. The king seems to have regarded the particular sickness in question in the light of punishment (Isa. xxxviii. 12, 13); he pleads his integrity as the reason why his life should be prolonged (ver. 3); and God confirms the promise to raise him up *by miracle* (ver. 5—8).

David, under similar circumstances, prays for the recovery of his child, but—*in vain* (2 Sam. xii. 16—19).

Paul says nothing about special prayer for Trophimus, whom he leaves sick; and while he gratefully acknowledges the mercy of God in raising up Epaphroditus, lest he should be crushed by over-much sorrow, he receives his recovery, not as an anticipated reply to the prayer of faith, but as a sovereign and unexpected mercy. Absolute and happy *acquiescence* in the Divine will is always our duty, and should be one of our highest privileges.

One or two additional illustrations will, perhaps, tend to show still more clearly, the extent of the evil we are endeavouring to point out.

(4) ‘*When He, the Spirit of Truth, is come, He will guide you into all truth*’ (John xvi. 13). Here, again, we have words spoken *to the Apostles* which are commonly, *by pro-*

jection, applied to ourselves. But it will be said, Do they not so apply? One would think it was enough to answer by asking two other questions,—*First*, Are we, *as a fact*, in the present day guided by the Holy Spirit ‘into all truth’? Or,—explain it as we may,—are we left to flounder amid errors of all kinds, quarrelling perpetually about religion, almost doubting whether any reply can be obtained to the question,—*What is Truth?*

Then, *secondly*, Were the Apostles guided, in such a sense, and to such a degree, that they were thereby qualified to be the teachers of mankind through all ages? *Most assuredly they were.* Why, then, should we doubt the true application of the text? As well might we say that the Spirit brings to OUR ‘remembrance all things whatsoever’ that Christ taught when He was on earth, or that He shows *us* ‘things to come’ (John xiv. 26 ; xvi. 13).

It is surely a blessed thing *to know* that the inspired teachers of the Church were directly and authoritatively taught of God ; but to imagine that WE are thus instructed is to destroy the value of Scripture altogether, by claiming for ourselves communications from Heaven of a character which, *if real*, cannot be other than infallible. When shall we learn that the action of the Spirit of God on the mind of man, if direct, is *inspiration*, whether the recipient be a good or a bad man,—a Balaam or a Paul ?

All other light is simply moral ; enlightening the mind *only by and through* the purification of the heart ; and this, whether the man so illuminated be an Augustine, a Luther, a Calvin, or an English peasant. To all such, the voice of Scripture is,—‘ If thine eye be single, thy whole body shall be full of light.’ He that ‘*doeth* the will of God shall know of the doctrine.’

The fruits of the Spirit are ‘love, joy, and peace,’ not

mental illumination, except in so far as these Divine qualities necessarily produce it, Too long have we fancied that the Spirit of God will enlighten us, *in spite of* cherished prejudices, bigotry, and want of candour. Little need is there, under such circumstances, for our marvelling that Inspiration should be so often misunderstood, or that it is so frequently confounded with genius, or spiritual intuition.

The only text that, *superficially viewed*, seems to justify the ordinary notion, is 1 John ii. 20, 'Ye have an unction from the Holy One, and ye know all things,' on which Dean Alford justly remarks, 'The expression explains itself, as referring to all things needful for right action in the matter under consideration—the ability to detect anti-christs' (ver. 18, 19). The 'unction' (*χρῖσμα*) is love and purity, which, as we have already said, is the means and weapon by which alone error can be detected and resisted.

(5) '*If two of you shall agree on earth as touching anything that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of My Father which is in heaven. For where two or three (of you) are gathered together in My name, there am I in the midst of them*' (Matt. xviii. 19, 20).

'I hesitate not' (says the Professor of Theology in the Free Church College, Aberdeen) 'to build upon this promise the following proposition: That the more extensively *we can organize an agreement* among all that love the Lord Jesus to ask for specific things in prayer, and the more symphonious those prayers are, the more assuredly will those things be done for us of His Father which is in heaven.' Hence *money* is raised, and *machinery* created, to secure what are called 'concerts' in prayer.

We should be the last to discourage social and united supplications for mercies of any kind, but we cannot help asking, *Is there no mistake here?* If the words quoted,

apply to Christians generally, those which immediately precede them *must do so too*; and in that case, any Christian community, meeting as 'a Church,' may say, 'Whatsoever (we) bind on earth shall be bound in heaven; and whatsoever (we) loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven' (ver. 18).

Again, 'James and John' *did* agree together to ask our Lord an important favour; and they put it in these words—'Master, *we* would that thou shouldest do for us whatsoever we shall desire;' but the only answer they received was, 'Ye know not what ye ask' (Mark x. 35—45). Yet the request was a *spiritual* one; for although 'the ten' were angry with their two brethren for putting it, the Lord was not. He does not rebuke the petitioners, but *the ten*, for their want of charity and humility in misjudging the two sons of Zebedee. Still, as we have already seen, *it was not granted*. What can be clearer, then, than the fact that the particular promise in question related *exclusively* to matters essential to the Apostles in the accomplishment of their work as His inspired servants?

To *us* it is said—'Beloved, if our heart condemn us not, then have we confidence toward God. And whatsoever we ask, we receive of Him, *because we keep His commandments*, and do those things that are pleasing in His sight' (1 John iii. 21, 22). And again,—'And this is the confidence that we have in Him, that, *if we ask anything according to His will*, He heareth us: and if we know that He hear us, whatsoever we ask, we know that (in the highest and best sense) we have the petitions that we desired of Him' (1 John v. 14, 15).

We very much doubt whether there is any reason to believe that, *as a fact*, God listens with more regard to united prayer than to solitary supplication; that Christ is, *in any higher sense*, present in the large assembly than in

the lonely closet of the believer; or that, as we are now, although in various phrase, perpetually told, 'the avenues of God's grace to man are narrowed,' because Christians do not meet in crowds to pray.

We might multiply these examples to almost any extent, were it desirable so to do. Passages relating to the Jewish Sabbath are in this way unscrupulously applied, without the slightest authority, to the Lord's day of the Christian; texts relating only to the successive priests of the Levitical law (such as Heb. v. 4) are quoted in support of 'an order' which has no such pretensions; exhortations to submission, founded on the possession of extraordinary gifts, Apostolic choice, or, it may be, inspired qualifications (Heb. xiii. 7, 17), are applied in relation to men who are in no way whatever distinguished above others, except by the possession of an 'office,' to which they have been presented or elected by mortals as fallible as themselves; and claims the most transcendental, involving the power of giving the Holy Ghost, of binding and loosing, and even of remitting or retaining sin, are defended by perversions of Scripture not one whit more respectable than those which are constantly brought forward in defence of Romish superstitions.

Abuses of this kind are now, unhappily, so common, that they excite but little attention, and, when noticed, are generally regarded as unimportant. We trust, however, that the day is coming when these things will be endured no longer; when it will be thought as unjustifiable, in interpreting Scripture, to project the past into the present, as it is to reverse the process, by insisting, as many do, that *the echo* of the New Testament is *the voice* of the Old, and that the entire Gospel pervades alike the Psalms, the Proverbs, the Song of Solomon, and the history of the Jewish kings.



CHAPTER XVII.

ON THE EXAGGERATION OF SCRIPTURE.

“ Pure oracles of Truth Divine!
Unlike each fabled dream
Given forth from Delphos' mystic shrine,
Or groves of Academe!
Childhood's preceptor! manhood's trust!
Old age's firm ally!
Our hope, when we go down to dust,
Of immortality!”

BERNARD BARTON.

By the *exaggeration* of Scripture we understand the use of passages in a sense stronger than that they were originally *intended* to bear; whether such ‘adding to’ the Divine Testimony,—for it is nothing less,—arise from *mistranslation*, from the erroneous *interpretation of imagery*, or from general misconception as to the *limits* under which any given statement is to be received.

The misfortune is, that these exaggerations prevail most on subjects in relation to which it is of all others important that the exact line of Truth should not be overstepped; that they are often winked at, if not encouraged, from an undue anxiety to produce immediate and salutary impression; and that commonly all discussion in relation to them is deprecated, on the ground that, as men are already far too little affected by the evil of sin, and far too careless

respecting its consequences, anything which *seems* to lessen the terribleness of disobedience, even though it should be by the removal of error, must be practically injurious.

The result, in accordance with that great law of retribution which operates as surely in religion as in everything else, is, that at the present time Infidelity plants its foot on these very exaggerations as the first step to confirmed unbelief; insinuates that, as a rule, the assertions of the pulpit and the calm conclusions of the scholar do not harmonize; that Truth, both in books and sermons, is commonly sacrificed to *effect*; that things are not exactly as they are represented; and that the most alarming appeals may be divested of much of their power by a careful examination of the words in which they are embodied, and the texts by which they are enforced. So true is it that exaggeration,—whatever may be its immediate effect,—invariably *weakens* the cause it is intended to support.

Scripture is sometimes exaggerated by mere *emphasis* being placed on words that are not in the original emphatic. ‘Often have we been pained to hear persons say of a passage, ‘It is *I will*; and when the Lord *wills*, who can withstand?’ for ‘He doeth according to His *will* in the armies of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth.’ What is this but a Protestant cabala, putting a meaning upon the Sacred Word which it was not intended to express?’

Little better is it to quote such a passage as Psa. vii. 11, in order to show that ‘God is angry *with the wicked* every day;’ since the words in italic form no part of the inspired original. The Prayer Book version of the text is, in this case, the true one—‘God is provoked every day.’

For the same reason,—*i. e.*, to avoid practical untruthful-

ness,—the word *Sheol*, which is commonly translated in the Old Testament ‘Hell,’ should never be used as if it implied the place of future punishment. When the Psalmist says, ‘The wicked shall be turned into Hell’ (Psa. ix. 18), why should we shrink from admitting that he simply means *the Grave*? It is the same word which is used prophetically of Messiah, ‘Thou wilt not leave my soul in Hell’ (Psa. xvi. 10). It is the same word that Jacob uses when he speaks of his ‘gray hairs’ being brought ‘with sorrow to the grave’ (Gen. xlii. 38).

Let us not be mistaken here. It is not that we wish to diminish the force of any threatening that we thus write. On the contrary, it is because we have an unshaken faith in the plain declarations of Scripture that we maintain the absolute necessity of neither adding one word, nor striking off one particle, from the testimony of Revelation. Exaggeration is treason to Truth.

With these feelings, we venture to call attention to the following passages:—

(1) ‘*Knowing therefore the terror of the Lord, we persuade men*’ (2 Cor. v. 11). This text, which is frequently brought forward to justify what are called ‘alarming’ sermons, is the stronghold of men who, with the best intentions, but with mischievous results, are continually denouncing sinners as ‘in the hands of an angry God,’—every hour on the brink of endless and unutterable woe.

Yet the Apostle does not really refer to the *terror* of the Lord at all. The word wrongly translated ‘terror,’ is precisely the same word as that which St. Paul uses a little further on (vii. 1), in the passage, ‘Perfecting holiness in the *fear* of God.’ Dean Alford interprets the text thus,—‘Being conscious of the fear of the Lord, we are free from

double dealing;’ and that is no doubt what the Apostle means.

(2) ‘*For every one shall be salted with fire, and every sacrifice shall be salted with salt*’ (Mark ix. 49).

Nearly all the older commentators assert, although without the slightest warrant, that the phrase ‘salted with fire,’ is intended to apply to wicked men, who will be ‘seasoned with fire itself, in order to be eternally tormented.’ Baxter is, however, an exception, as he considers the fire intended to be that of ‘affliction on earth.’

The context, if carefully examined, demonstrates that this is the true meaning. Our Lord had been teaching *the disciples*,—for it is to them He is speaking, that, as in cases of gangrene, it is frequently necessary to lose parts of the body in order to preserve life, so, in relation to the soul, it is needful to cut off, at whatever cost, *everything* that would, if not thus separated, occasion eternal ruin.

What more natural after this than the *unexpressed*, but not unfelt inquiry on the part of the disciples, ‘Why such severity?’ The words that follow supply the answer,—‘For’ (because) ‘every one’ (who enters my kingdom) ‘shall be salted with fire’ (purified by discipline); ‘and every sacrifice’ (as under the Old Testament dispensation) ‘shall be salted with salt’—seasoned with grace, Col. iv. 6 (to render it acceptable; see Lev. ii. 13). He, therefore, who will not submit to this purifying process, who will not consent to the removal of *all* that hinders life and growth in the soul, *chooses* death rather than life, and practically prefers the loathsomeness of corruption to eternal purity and blessedness. Then follows the exhortation (ver. 50),—‘Have salt’ (wisdom and grace) ‘in yourselves, and have peace one with another.’ For the conversation had originated in a dispute as to who should be the greatest.

(3) ‘*Who among us shall dwell with the devouring fire? who among us shall dwell with everlasting burnings?*’ (Isa. xxxiii. 14).

Every one knows that these words are constantly used as if they referred to the punishment of sinners in the world to come; yet not a single commentator of any repute ventures so to interpret them. Matthew Henry, who in this case represents others, shows clearly enough that the fire referred to was that occasioned by the Assyrian army, and that no reference whatever is made to the world that is to come. Dean Alford (in a note on Mark ix. 49) seems to think that, in any case, the fire is to be regarded as purifying; since the answer to the question is,—‘He that walketh in righteousness;’ he alone can endure these calamities, because he sees the hand of God in all.

On such a text as Mark ix. 44,—‘Where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched,’ considering its awful import, we would rather say no more than this:—It is a quotation from Isaiah (lxvi. 24), where the words are used, not in connection with living and sensitive beings, but with dead carcasses. Read, therefore, in the sense in which Isaiah wrote them,—the sense, as we believe, in which Christ quoted them,—they fully harmonize with other passages of Scripture which teach that the wilfully impenitent *lose* all the blessedness of Eternal Life, *endure* all the pangs of the ‘second death,’ whatever that may mean, and *become* eternally loathsome, ‘an abhorring to all flesh.’

What right have we to change the meaning altogether, and turn ‘the worm’ into remorse of conscience, and the ‘unquenchable fire’ into the undying torment of the sinner who is cast into it? We may think we *deepen* thereby the horrors of eternal woe, and by that process *deter* men from

sin. Greatly is it to be feared that by these devices we but pave the way for the more rapid advance of Popery and Infidelity.

(4) '*But I say unto you that every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment*' (Matt. xii. 36).

It was in consequence of misconceiving the true object of this saying of our Lord that the Puritans in England, and the Covenanters in Scotland, inculcated a severity of manners which has often, although unjustly, laid them open to the charge of hypocrisy. *They* thought that Christ spake of the many trivial observations and levities which, especially among the young, mark social intercourse in all parts of the world, and so they frowned upon all mirth, however innocent. But this was an error. True indeed it is, that a man's *responsibility* extends to every action he performs, every word he utters, and every thought he encourages. Nor would it be difficult to show that, on any other supposition, responsibility itself would be altogether destroyed. Still, this is not the meaning of the passage under consideration.

The warning of the Lord, from the context, is evidently directed against the senseless accusation of the Pharisees,—‘This fellow doth not cast out devils, but by Beelzebub the prince of the devils.’ The charge was but an idle one,—a mere malicious taunt,—for the men who made it did not believe what they asserted. Yet the accusation, notwithstanding its levity, involved the sin of blasphemy. It was an ‘idle word.’ In like manner profane oaths, in which the most awful denunciations are frequently expressed without the slightest intention of affixing any serious meaning to the phrases uttered, are ‘idle words’ which fall under the special condemnation of the text.

(5) ‘*I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection: lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway*’ (1 Cor. ix. 27). So writes the Apostle; and many tell us that he here intimates that, so far from being assured that he was safe in Christ, he trembles, lest, after all his labours and sufferings, he should fall into some sensual snare, and be eternally lost. But this is not his meaning. What Paul really felt so anxious to secure was, (notwithstanding all its sorrows and trials,) *the continuance of his Apostleship*, and its exceeding great reward. He disciplines himself, lest carelessness should lead to a fall of any kind, by which his character would be injured, and he become thereby a vessel unfit for the Master’s use. ‘Know ye not,’ he says, ‘that they which run in a race *run all*, but *one* receiveth the prize?’

Instead of furnishing more instances, we submit the following general observations:—

(a) It is an exaggeration to expound passages of Scripture which declare the total depravity of man, as if they were intended to teach that every one of his thoughts and feelings are, by nature, base and bad; that *all* men, in the sight of God, are *equally* wicked; or that the children of Adam are actually destitute of everything that can be spoken of as morally lovely. Scripture says no such thing. It speaks only of man’s natural destitution of all that is worthy the name of *holiness*; of everything that could serve for his justification in the sight of God.

(b) It is a familiar exaggeration to talk as if every person, young or old, was bound to consider or to speak of himself as ‘the *chief* of sinners,’ because the Apostle Paul, reflecting on the melancholy fact that he had once been a persecutor of the Church of Christ, so designates his own condition. By the phrase in question, St. Paul simply

gives us to understand that he regarded his own lot as *special*, his sin as *peculiar*, and his filling the office of Apostle as a more *wonderful* display of mercy than any other man could boast of. Such expressions, when they occur in the diaries of persons who, by Divine grace, have been singularly preserved from temptation to evil, seem to involve more or less of *unreality*.

(c) It is but an exaggeration to say, as many of the old divines used to do, that 'sin is an *infinite* evil, and deserves an *infinite* punishment, because it is committed against an infinite God.' No such method of making men sensible of the aggravated character of their guilt is sanctioned by Scripture. It is there deemed enough to say, and with a far deeper impressiveness, 'that it is an evil thing and bitter' to forsake the Lord (Jer. ii. 19); that 'it is a fearful thing' (by rebellion and impenitence) 'to fall into the hands of the living God' (Heb. x. 31); that the great aggravation of human guilt is, that it is always committed against a law of love. 'For this,'—because it is contrary to the law of love,—'Thou shalt not commit adultery, Thou shalt not steal' (Rom. xiii. 8, 9).

(d) The broad distinction usually drawn between the Old and New Testament dispensations, relative to rewards and punishments, is commonly an exaggerated one. It is not true to assert, as is frequently done, that the retributions threatened to the Jew were temporal, while those of the Christian are eternal; for it would probably be found, if the secret histories of Christian men could be exposed to view, that many of them are now as severely punished on earth for their sins as ever the Israelite was. The Psalmist's difficulty as to the prosperity of the wicked, could find no solution until he went into the temple of God, and considered their *end*. Under the Jewish dispen-

sation, the righteous were constantly in affliction; and under the Christian, 'Godliness is profitable unto all things, having promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come' (1 Tim. iv. 8).

It is in this spirit of exaggeration that *doctrines* are often pushed to consequences which Scripture, to say the least, does not sanction, and which, by their extravagance, often greatly promote dangerous reaction.

By a similar one-sided exaggeration of particular truths, good men sometimes bring themselves practically to deny that 'godliness is profitable unto *all things*, having promise of *the life that now is*,' as well as of 'that which is to come' (1 Tim. iv. 8); and hence fancy they ought to denounce as evil, philanthropic associations, government, and magistracy, —everything, in short, that seeks to improve the world by other means than the preaching of the Gospel.

Teaching of this character cannot be otherwise than hurtful. What we need is more faith in Scripture, and less in Theology; more confidence in the calm thoughts of the Inspired Volume, and less in the excited utterances of fallible men. Till we get this, the serious students of the Divine Word will be *few*, and the hasty acceptors of extravagance, *many*.

Once more, therefore, we warn all honest students of Holy Scripture to 'take heed *how* they read;' to beware of interpretations which, however popular, can neither be sustained by the scholar, nor justified by the devout; to dread especially those *forms of unbelief* which disguise themselves under the robe of earnestness; but which are really nothing better than expressions of that want of faith in Scripture *as it is*, which is the curse of the Church, and the ruin of the world.



CHAPTER XVIII.

ON TYPICAL AND ALLEGORICAL INTERPRETATIONS.

“O how unlike the complex works of man
Heaven’s easy, artless, unencumbered plan!
No meretricious graces to beguile;
No clustering ornaments to clog the pile;
From ostentation as from weakness free
It stands, like the cerulean arch we see,
Majestic in its own simplicity.”

COWPER.

FEW thoughtful readers of Scripture will dispute that *events* in the earlier dispensation sometimes foreshadow other events in the later. As readily will it be allowed, that illustrations are not unfrequently drawn from the Old Testament by the writers of the New, in which *persons* there spoken of are regarded as prefiguring other and later personages.

Our Lord himself in this way illustrates his burial and resurrection by the history of Jonah (Matt. xii. 40), and His lifting up on the cross by that of the brazen serpent (John iii. 14). Again, He is said to be ‘a High Priest after the order of Melchisedek’ (Heb. vii.); while the preservation of Noah and his family in the ark seems, by the Apostle Peter, to be regarded as symbolical of the preservation of the elect (1 Pet. iii. 20).

Nothing, however, is built on these resemblances. They

illustrate later truth, but cannot, on that account, strictly speaking, be termed types; since there is nothing to show that either the events or persons referred to were *designed* to be such, and that therefore they should be regarded as '*actual prophecies*' of things to come.

In answering the question, 'What rule should be adopted in deciding whether a passage or a person is or is not typical?' we believe that none safer or better can be laid down than that which is advocated by Bp. Marsh. It is this: 'There is no other rule by which we can distinguish a real from a pretended type than that of Scripture itself. There are no other possible means by which we can know that a previous design and a pre-ordained connection existed. Whatever persons or things, therefore, recorded in the Old Testament were expressly declared by Christ and His Apostles to have been designed as prefigurations of persons or things relating to the New Testament, such persons or things, so recorded in the former, are types of the persons or things with which they are compared in the latter.

'But if we assert that a person or thing was *designed to prefigure* another person or thing, *where no such prefiguration has been declared by Divine authority*, we make an assertion for which we neither have nor can have the slightest foundation.' In short, to borrow the words of Professor Moses Stuart, 'just so much of the Old Testament is to be accounted typical as the New Testament affirms to be so, *and no more.*' This takes the whole question out of the hands of fanciful expositors, and enables the most unlettered reader to decide what is typical and what is not.

Dr. Davidson, in his 'Introduction,' a little modifies this view; but the result is not, after all, very different. He says, 'Various places in the New Testament intimate or expressly assert that most of the institutions peculiar to

the old *prefigured* spiritual things under the new economy. The Epistle to the Hebrews plainly shows that the entire Levitical law, with its sacrifices, rites, and priests, foreshadowed better things (Comp. x. 1; vii. 11—22; viii. 1—13; ix. 1; x. 18). The same view is given by Paul in the Epistle to the Colossians (ii. 17). The Epistle to the Galatians has it also (iii. 24). But inasmuch as the various parts of these institutions are nowhere placed side by side with spiritual correlatives, it is obviously unsafe for us to do more than to receive *generally* that which it has not pleased God to explain in detail. So far as these types have a *prophetic* character, they are clear enough for practical purposes; but, like other prophecies, they are not to be interpreted *minutely*, according to the fancy of the expositor.'

If these principles had always been adhered to, from what a load of overshadowing error would Scripture have been delivered. For what is a man to make of his Bible who is told by one, that Moses, in 'forty particulars,' typifies Christ; by another, that 'every passage in the Old Testament looks backward, and forward, and every way, like light from the sun, not only to the state before and under the Law, but under the Gospel too;' by a third, that there are forty-nine typical resemblances between Joseph and Christ, and seventeen between Jacob and Christ,—his worst actions being regarded equally symbolical with the best.*

Nor should it be forgotten (for it is a solemn warning), that on this use of the supposed types and figures of the Old Testament the Roman Catholic Church builds most of her tenets.

All this folly, for it cannot properly be designated by any other name, rests on the notion that Truth instead of being simply *revealed in* the Bible, is to be *developed out of it* by

* Mather, Keach, Taylor, Gould, and others, quoted by Fairbairn.

human ingenuity ; that underneath its *direct* teachings lie intimations which may justly be made the basis of new discoveries ; and that *depths of meaning* are to be found in the plainest statements, if only the investigator be spiritual enough to discern them.

Let this doctrine once be allowed, and nothing can be clearer than that, under its operation, the Word of God is turned into an enigma, and Truth lies prostrate at the mercy of the fanciful, the ingenious, and the weak. 'Under such methods,' it has been well said, 'we may shut our lexicons, and draw lots for the sense.'

Intimately connected with this abuse of Scripture, and equally foolish and dangerous, is the attempt to attach *more than one meaning* to any passage of Holy Writ, whatever variety of applications it may admit of.

The Fathers, as we have already said, are untrustworthy as expositors, mainly on account of the vicious habit into which they fell, of multiplying meanings in Scripture. Some held to a fourfold, some to a threefold, and others to a twofold sense in the Sacred Text. Origen is supposed to have maintained a *twofold sense*, and a *fourfold application*, of all Scripture. Others denied a *literal* sense altogether ; and most of them imagined that such a sense was far too meagre to be worthy of God, and that the literal meaning was merely intended to be the vehicle of higher and more ethereal teaching. The Bible by this means was made, in their hands, 'to reflect every hue of fancy, and every shade of belief, in those who assumed the office of interpretation ;' and the result was, that instead of being rendered serviceable for practical instruction, it soon became 'one vast sea of uncertainty and confusion.'

The school in question is not yet extinct. Many still regard this fanciful mode of dealing with Scripture as

eminently spiritual; some by its help developing out of the prophecies the most extraordinary conclusions concerning passing events; and others, holding a different view, explaining away, by a like process, the plainest declarations of the Word of God relative to the Second Advent of Christ, and the character of the dispensation under which we live.

The death of Abel, we are still told, prefigures the sacrifice of Christ; 'Enoch is a figure of the Church (of the latter day), which shall be taken away before human evil reaches its climax, and before the Divine judgment falls thereon;' while 'Noah, on the other hand, is a figure of the remnant of Israel, who shall be brought through the deep waters of affliction, and through the fire of judgment, and led into the full enjoyment of millennial bliss, in virtue of God's everlasting covenant.'

The building of Babel indicates 'the spirit in which associations are now formed for purposes of philanthropy, religion, or politics.' Sodom and Gomorrah represent the world as distinguished from the little flock; and Rebekah leaving her Father's house to marry Isaac, is called 'a most touching and beautiful illustration of the Church, under the conduct of the Holy Ghost, going onward to meet her heavenly Bridegroom.'

We pause here; and in doing so are anxious to avoid misconception. We are far from denying that the Scripture narratives of the Old Testament are intended to teach *us* very important spiritual lessons; and we will yield to no one in reverence for these Divine oracles. It is *because* we reverence them so highly, that we remonstrate against this mischievous habit of 'adding to' them that which is purely human and largely erroneous.

We feel most deeply that in all ages the Church has been far too apt to forget that this is not her home; that her

children are but pilgrims and strangers here, as all their fathers were; and that with most of the ambitions of earth the Christian should have nothing to do. But when we are told, in effect, that progress in science is sin; that 'a Christian asserting his rights' with his fellow-man is not 'perfect as his Father, for his Father is dealing in *grace*, whereas he is dealing in *righteousness*;' that all the concerns of the world, even its government and magistracy, are to be abandoned to the ungodly, we cannot but protest most earnestly against what we consider to be unscriptural perversions of God's Holy Word.

We conclude by laying down the following rule:—He who would understand his Bible must be content to regard as typical or allegorical *such portions of Scripture only* as are declared to be such on Inspired authority; he must be satisfied with the one plain and paramount meaning which manifests itself to the simple-minded in connection with the context; and disregarding all human fancies, however spiritual the teacher of such imaginations may be supposed to be, he must determine, at all hazards, to take the Book just as it stands; to accept it in the spirit of a little child; to confess that he has before him but fragments of a truth that is, *in its entirety*, infinite; and be content to wait for the day when that which now often seems to us to be 'torn into a thousand pieces, and scattered to the four winds of heaven,' shall be gathered limb to limb, and 'moulded with every joint and member into an immortal feature of loveliness and perfection.'

O Almighty God, grant us, we pray Thee, the spirit of wisdom and of a sound mind; that in all sobriety and humility we may search the Scriptures, and so be enabled rightly to interpret the revelation of Thy will, through Jesus Christ Our Lord.



CHAPTER XIX.

ON TECHNICAL TERMS IN SCRIPTURE.

“ Our fathers, in the days gone by,
Read thee in dim and sacred caves,
Or in the deep wood silently
Met, where thick branches o'er them waved.
They sought the hope Thy record gave,
When thou wast a forbidden thing,
And the strong chain and bloody grave
Were all on earth thy love could bring.”

Anon.

EVERY science, and Theology among the rest, has its technical terms.

With these, so far as they are merely Theological, and not Scriptural, we do not intermeddle. We propose to notice such only as occur in our Authorized Version, and which derive a colouring, in the eyes of ordinary readers, from their technical use in theological discussions.

We fully admit that many of these terms cannot be dispensed with; that such words as Regeneration, Conversion, Atonement, Election, Covenant, Law, Grace, Salvation, Justification, and Sanctification, are not to be set aside because they have often been used without discrimination, or been sometimes regarded as offensive to men of taste. Yet is it of great importance that these phrases should be

Scripturally understood ; that they should not be expounded in accordance with merely theological associations ; but always in accordance with the sense they were intended to bear in the particular passage wherein they may occur. Most of them are used in different places, in different *senses* ; and if this fact be not recognized, nothing but confusion of thought can ensue. *e.g.*—

REGENERATION, in its ordinary acceptance amongst us, is intended, *and rightly*, to express that great moral change which is elsewhere denominated being ‘born again’—born, ‘not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God’—(John i. 13). Yet it is indisputable that in *the only two places* in which this particular word occurs in the English Version of the New Testament, it does not mean anything of the kind. In one instance (Tit. iii. 5), it is used in the sense of *a change of profession by baptism* ; in the other (Matt. xix. 28), it is employed in the sense of Resurrection,—‘when the Son of man shall sit in the throne of His glory.’

CONVERSION is sometimes used to express an entire and radical change of conduct, following renewal of heart ; and sometimes to indicate return from a temporary course of wrong doing. It is used in the former sense in the Acts (xv. 3), where Paul speaks of the conversion of the Gentiles : it is used in the latter sense by our Lord, when He says to Peter, ‘When thou are converted, strengthen thy brethren’ (Luke xxii. 32).

ATONEMENT is a word which occurs but once in our version of the New Testament (Rom. v. 11), and *there* it is mistranslated, since it ought to have been rendered ‘Reconciliation.’ As it stands, it conveys the idea of *substitution by sacrifice*, a truth which, whether taught or not in Scripture, is not expressed in the passage in question.

ELECTION is a term ordinarily understood as implying the selection by God from eternity of certain persons to be saved from hell, and made holy in Christ; the rest of mankind being left to that natural weakness and perversity which is their sin, and which will inevitably involve them in eternal misery. Into this view, regarded as a doctrine we cannot here enter; but it is right to observe, that in the New Testament the word is frequently, if not ordinarily, used in relation to *service*.

In this sense it is applied to Christ (Matt. xii. 18; 1 Pet. ii. 6); to angels (1 Tim. v. 21); to the Apostles (John xv. 16—19); and to Christians generally (1 Pet. ii. 9). In the Old Testament it is so used with regard to Christ (Isa. xlii. 1); and to David (2 Sam. vi. 21; Psa. lxxviii. 70).

GRACE sometimes stands for 'the free and eternal love and favour of God, which is the spring and source of all the benefits we receive from Him' (Rom. xi. 6; 2 Tim. i. 9; John iii. 16). Sometimes for the work of the Spirit renewing the soul (Rom. vi. 14; 2 Cor. xii. 9). Sometimes for the Divine favour, as manifested in reconciliation (Rom. v. 2), in the love of Christ (2 Cor. viii. 9), and in the Gospel generally (1 Peter v. 12). Sometimes it is put for the virtues wrought by the Spirit of God in the heart of a renewed man (2 Cor. viii. 7; 2 Pet. iii. 18). And sometimes it merely means the favour or friendship of a fellow-mortal (Gen xxxix. 4). In each of these cases the context, and that alone, decides the meaning.

COVENANT, though always implying 'an agreement,' is a word that is applied in the Bible in various ways. There is the Covenant of Works (Gen. ii. 17), and there is the Covenant of Grace (Ephes. i. 3—4; 2 Tim. i. 9). There is the Covenant of which Circumcision was the seal, and with

which the rites and ceremonies of the Jewish economy were inseparably connected; and there is the New Covenant (Heb. viii. 6—8), which brings freedom from the burdensome ritual resting on the Jew. The importance of keeping these distinctions clearly in mind becomes obvious when we read what St. Paul says in relation to Law.

LAW, in Scripture, certainly does not always mean the same thing. Sometimes it stands for conscience, or the Law of Nature (Rom. ii. 14); sometimes for the Moral Law, as embodied in the Ten Commandments (Rom. ii. 25; vii. 7); and sometimes for the Ceremonial Law of the Jews (Gal. iii. 11; Phil. iii. 5; Heb. vii. 19). It is in this latter sense alone that St. Paul uses it whenever he speaks of the impossibility of Justification by the Law. He does not, of course, mean to imply that man can stand before God, justified by works, *in any sense*; but his argument always relates to the Ceremonial Law. He would have been the last man to maintain that at any period of his life he was *morally* blameless; although he insists that *ceremonially* he was without fault (Phil. iii. 6). It is this Law of Ordinances alone that Christ has abolished (Ephes. ii. 15).

Luther, with great power and wisdom, used the doctrine of Justification by Faith alone, as his most trusty weapon in contending against indulgences, pardons, masses for the dead, and such like superstitions. Wesley and Whitefield urged it in England as against *formal observances*, whether in the shape of prayers, church going, sacraments, or almsgiving. In the present day it is too often presented as if it were the antagonist of good works; whereas, in Scripture, faith and works are always regarded as inseparable. It was probably to meet some such tendency, that the Apostle James wrote his Epistle (Jas. ii. 14—26).

HEAVEN. This word (*οὐρανός*) occurs about two hundred and eighty times in the New Testament only. In *ten* it is translated 'air'—the fowls of the air—(Luke viii. 5); in *five* it is rendered 'sky' (Luke xii. 56); in *eighty-six* it is put for the visible firmament (Mark xiii. 25); in *eighty-three* it indicates the peculiar residence of God and of the Holy Angels (Acts vii. 49); in *thirty-three* it is associated with the kingdom of the Redeemer (Matt. iii. 2); and in the Apocalypse it is commonly put for the world of separate spirits, or *Hades*. It is impossible to understand Scripture if these distinctions are not borne in mind.

HELL (*Sheol*) invariably stands in the Old Testament, either for the grave, or for the invisible world of spirits.

In the New Testament, several distinct words, widely different in meaning, are alike translated HELL; a practice which necessarily leads to a good deal of confusion in the mind of the English reader. *Hades* is thus always translated HELL, although it never means the place of final punishment. *Gehenna*, which probably has that meaning, occurs *twelve* times. It is not possible here to note the distinct meaning in each case. The attention of an intelligent reader should, however, be directed to this misleading diversity.

MERCY is a word which, in most cases, ought to be rendered *favour*, since it by no means implies the clemency of a judge sparing a criminal, but rather the bestowal of kindness.

WRATH, in like manner, when attributed to God, is by most persons connected with Eternal Punishment, although without warrant. It simply signifies *displeasure*, and is in the Prophets applied to different degrees of punishment, whether inflicted or only threatened. Isaiah speaks of 'a little wrath' (liv. 8). Jeremiah of 'great

wrath' (xxxii. 37). In the New Testament it is applied to the destruction of Jerusalem (Luke xxi. 22, 23).

SALVATION, although now commonly used by us to signify deliverance from Hell, by no means generally, or as a rule, bears that interpretation in Scripture. For although it be quite true that Christ saves us 'from wrath' (Rom. v. 9), it is in a still higher sense true that He delivers us from the slavery of sin. A careful examination of passages, such as Matt. i. 21; Acts iii. 26; Rom. i. 16; Phil. ii. 12; Ephes. i. 13; v. 23; vi. 17, and many others, will satisfy a thoughtful person that, *as a rule*, the word 'Salvation' is, in the New Testament, associated, not so much with any future blessing, as with a present deliverance from the bondage of moral evil.

SANCTIFICATION is the last term of this class to which we shall refer. It sometimes signifies separation for holy or religious uses (Gen. ii. 3; Exod. xiii. 2); and sometimes the actual cleansing of the soul (1 Cor. vi. 11). It is sometimes applied to God when His judgments are made known (Numb. xx. 13; Ezek. xxxvi. 23); and sometimes to Messiah as the King and Head of the Church (John x. 36). But its ordinary meaning is *actual purification*; whether ceremonial, as in the case of the Jews, or moral and spiritual, as in the case of the Christian (Exod. xix. 10—22; Josh. iii. 5; Lev. x. 3; 1 Cor. vi. 11).

Lord of all power and might, grant us, we beseech Thee, a deep and true insight into Thy glorious Truth; that, justified by grace, and renewed in the spirit of our minds by the indwelling of the Holy Ghost, the Comforter, we may be sanctified for Thy service both here and hereafter, and at length enter into the joy of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.



CHAPTER XX.

ON THE USE OF ECCLESIASTICAL TERMS IN SCRIPTURE.

“ Our little systems have their day,
They have their day and cease to be ;
They are but broken lights of Thee,
And Thou, O Lord, art more than they.”

TENNYSON.

IN the chapter immediately preceding this we have only referred to technical terms which are so in the original, and not *made* such by any particular translation of them. We must now notice a class of words which sometimes mislead in consequence of their mistranslation.

The translators of the Bible into the present Authorised Version—laborious men, and worthy of all honour,—were not altogether free agents in the work they undertook. King James expressly commanded them not to change ‘the old ecclesiastical words ;’ and in their Preface to the large Bible they tell us they have regarded the admonition. It will be necessary, therefore, to refer to certain instances in which it will be seen that adherence to the Royal Mandate has *darkened* the sense of the original.

EASTER (Acts xii. 4) : ‘Intending after Easter to bring him forth to the people.’ The word “Easter” (*πασχα*) should unquestionably have been translated ‘Feast’ or ‘Passover.’ It occurs twenty-nine times, and is so translated everywhere else. The text plainly means that Herod

would not bring forth Peter until after Passover,—including the days of unleavened bread (John xviii. 28).

BISHOP (1 Tim. iii. 2; Titus i. 7). The word here translated ‘bishop’ (ἐπισκοπος) should have been rendered ‘inspector’ or ‘overseer;’ since it has no special reference to what we understand by a diocesan prelate. The phrase indicates ‘an office;’ probably *in some respects* corresponding to a modern bishopric, but in other respects very different. Episkopos is in one instance (Acts xx. 28) translated ‘overseer,’ and it would have been much better had it always been so rendered.

CHURCH (ἐκκλησια) is a word which *three* times stands for a mere *assembly* of persons (*e. g.*, Acts xix. 32—40, where the word ecclesia is so rendered); *once* for the body of the Israelites in the wilderness (Acts vii. 38), where Moses is spoken of as he ‘that was in *the Church* in the wilderness;’ *fifteen* times it indicates a particular society of Christians, meeting either in one place or in different parts of a town or city (*e. g.*, Acts xi. 22; 1 Cor. xvi. 19). Ordinarily (about *eighty-five* times) it denotes the entire body of professing Christians dwelling in any given city or district,—in Judea, or among the Gentiles (*e. g.*, Acts ix. 31; Rom. xvi. 4; 1 Cor. vii. 17). In all these cases the Church is regarded as an *outward or visible* thing. *Ten* times it is used to indicate true and spiritual members, *as distinguished from* the hypocritical or self-deceived (*e. g.*, Ephes i. 1—3; Col. i. 18—24); and in all these cases it is regarded as an *invisible* society.

MINISTER (διακονος). This word occurs thirty times in the New Testament, and is sometimes translated ‘minister’ (Matt. xx. 26); sometimes ‘deacon’ (1 Tim. iii. 8); and sometimes ‘servant’ (Mark ix. 35). It is the word used to indicate the ‘servants’ that waited at the marriage feast

(John ii. 5 and 9); it is applied to magistrates (Rom. xiii. 4); and to womanly service in the case of Phebe of Cenchrea (Rom. xvi. 1). As it is so plain that the word simply expresses 'service,' and that it is so used by Paul when applied either to apostles or elders (1 Cor. iii. 5; 2 Cor. iii. 6), it certainly is a great pity that it should have come to be associated exclusively with preachers of the gospel.

DEACON (*διακονος*) falls under the same head. There is in the New Testament no office, so called, which corresponds either to the 'deacon' of the Episcopal church, or to that of the Congregationalists. The word simply means 'service.' So far as the authority of Scripture is concerned, a minister may be called a deacon, or a deacon a minister, or a Christian visitor one or both, without any violation of its teaching. Martha was a deacon to Christ when cumbered with much serving; and Paul when he went to Jerusalem to minister to the saints (Rom. xv. 25), although the money was actually distributed by their own elders (Acts xi. 30).

Among Congregationalists, the office of the deacon is generally traced to the transaction recorded in the sixth chapter of the Acts, where the Church at Jerusalem, by the advice of the apostles, is said to have selected seven men, 'full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom,' to superintend the service of tables, and to silence the murmurings of those who thought that certain widows 'were neglected in the daily ministration.'

It should, however, be recollected that these persons were not chosen to a permanent office, but to meet a present necessity; for the word rendered 'business' (*χρηια*) ought to have been translated 'need,' or 'necessity.' It occurs forty times in the New Testament, and is so rendered everywhere else.

Further, the persons thus selected are nowhere called deacons. That no such permanent office existed is rendered at least probable by the fact that the money raised by the disciples at Antioch for the poor was sent to the 'elders' at Jerusalem (Acts xi. 30).

But it will be said, 'Why, then, are deacons, *as such*, required to possess certain moral qualities (1 Tim. iii. 8) ? and what is meant by the phrase, 'They that have used the office of a deacon well' ' (1 Tim. iii. 13) ?

We reply,—The demand of the apostle for certain moral qualifications applies, and is intended to apply, not to any office in particular, but to *service* for the Church, of whatever kind. 'They that have used the office of a deacon well,' should be read, 'They that have diaconized, or performed service (of any kind) well (marg. *ministered*), purchase to themselves a good degree.'

The office of 'deacon,' as now recognised either in Episcopal or Congregational churches, may be very useful and honourable, as it undoubtedly is, but it can derive no authority in either case from Scripture, since the word so translated ought simply to have been rendered 'service.'

PREACH. Some may perhaps be startled when told that the word 'preach' has no reference whatever to *any particular mode* of telling the glad tidings of salvation ; but it is nevertheless true.

The word *εὐαγγελίζω* literally means to announce glad tidings, and simply relates to the first information that is given to a person or people on that subject ; that is, when the subject may properly be called *news*. As to the manner of giving such information, the same word may not improperly be used, *in whatever way* the thing be notified ; *publicly or privately*, aloud or in a whisper, to one or to many.

The English word 'preach' fails to communicate the idea given us in the New Testament; because with us it implies 'a public and continued discourse,' which is by no means the sense conveyed to us in Scripture.

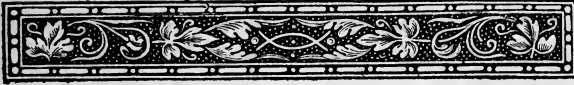
In like manner the word κηρυσσω, used in the Epistle to the Romans (x. 14), 'How shall they hear without a preacher?' does not mean 'one who pronounces a public discourse on sacred subjects,' but simply 'a herald publishing tidings; his message may be only a single sentence, and a very short sentence too; and though it certainly implies *public notice*, accompanied by warning to do or to forbear something, it never denotes either a comment on, or explanation of any doctrine, critical observations on, or illustrations of any subject, or a chain of reasoning in proof of a particular sentiment.* In short, it never means what we understand by preaching.

The supposition that the gospel is to be promoted only or mainly by clergymen or ministers, and by didactic teaching, whether in sermons, tracts, or exhortations, public or private, is an error which has led, in many cases, to forgetfulness of individual responsibility altogether.

We have probably now said enough to put the reader of Scripture on his guard in relation to the use and authority of ecclesiastical terms.

* Prelim. Diss. to Campbell on the Gospels.

God of all grace, whom rightly to know is life eternal; grant us so to receive Thy Son Jesus Christ as the Way, the Truth, and the Life; that, following the steps of Thy holy Apostles, we may steadfastly walk in the way that leadeth to everlasting blessedness, through the same our Lord and Saviour.



CHAPTER XXI.

ON THE INFLUENCE OF HYMNS AND OTHER SACRED POETRY ON POPULAR INTERPRETATION.

“Linked with the whisper of the trees,
When summer eves were fair and still ;
Set to the music of the breeze,
Or murmur of the twilight rill ;

“Linked with some scene of sacred calm,
Of holy places, holy days ;
Linked with the prayer, the hymn, the psalm,
The multitude’s glad voice of praise.”

BONAR.

To say that the Bible is as often interpreted by the hymn-book of the dissenter, as it is by the Prayer-book of the churchman, is but to state a simple truth. The impressions which are received from the one, not unfrequently *bias* the interpretation given to the other. Embodying, as popular hymns do, almost every shade of theological sentiment ; forming, in their use, no unimportant part of public worship ; committed to memory in early youth ; meditated upon in the closet ; recited in seasons of joy or sorrow ; and whispered in the ears of the dying, it is almost impossible to exaggerate the influence they exercise in the formation and support of particular religious views.

Far be it from us to depreciate sacred song, or even to

speaking lightly of an agency which has been so greatly blessed of God both to the conversion and edification of multitudes. But it may surely be permitted us to suggest, that both hymns and psalms (so called) are purely *human* compositions; that they sometimes pervert, and that they commonly exaggerate, Scripture truth; that a guard should always be kept against their becoming authoritative; and that, however touching or beautiful they may be, care should be taken lest, as they steal into the soul, they should carry with them some seed of error which, mingling with the purest and best affections, may become in time a master-thought, which it is next to impossible to eradicate.

Wesley's hymns come to hundreds of thousands of simple minds with a weight fully equal to that of any inspired composition; and Watts's are regarded by multitudes more as second only to Holy Writ.

From a recent article in the *Methodist Magazine*, it would seem that Wesley's hymns are all but officially recognised as summaries of the faith of his followers. The writer says:—'Apart from the utility of the hymn-book as a manual of devotion, it has answered another purpose of primary importance. It may be regarded as an authenticated standard of doctrine, by which all the essential points of belief are clearly defined. It is common to refer to Mr. Wesley's Sermons, and Notes on the New Testament, as embodying *our* distinctive theology. But if I were asked by a stranger to refer him to the most popular compendium of Wesleyan doctrine, I should refer him to the hymn-book. That book contains the belief of the mass of our people. Their commentaries and institutes are there. The strains which are familiar to every household, *these* are in reality the creeds and articles of a community. And so, while Charles Wesley was composing the strains which

were to animate our devotion, he was at the same time fixing our doctrinal standards. As long as the hymn-book keeps its place in our public worship, our households, and closets, so long will the purity of our faith be guarded by the double defence of the understanding and the affections.'

And yet it would not be difficult to find, in the productions both of Watts and Wesley—great and good men as they were,—many statements which will not bear examination by the light of truth; much that is exaggerated or one-sided; many things, in short, that distinctly bear the mark of the particular views, prejudices, and errors of the writers.

Even versions of Scripture are by no means exempt from this charge. The psalm, as it stands in the Bible, is often very different in character from the psalm as it reads in the metrical version.

Dr. Watts frankly avows that, in accommodating the Book of Psalms to Christian worship, he found it necessary to divest David and Asaph of every other character than that of a psalmist and a saint, and '*to make them always speak the common sense and language of a Christian.*'

That the excellent Doctor, to whom the Church is so much indebted, intended to accomplish this without irreverence, we are quite sure; but that he always succeeded in the attempt we are not so certain. He adds, 'I have not been so curious and exact in striving everywhere to express the sense and meaning of David, but have rather expressed myself as *I may suppose David would have done* had he lived in the days of Christianity; and by this means, perhaps, I have sometimes hit upon the true intent of the Spirit of God in these verses farther and clearer than David himself could ever discover. In several other places I hope my reader will find *a natural exposition of many a*

dark and doubtful text, and some new beauties and connections of thought discovered in the Jewish poet, though not in the language of a Jew.'

We do not quote these passages in order to find fault with Dr. Watts. He frankly *avows* what he thought it right to do, and he plainly tells us that in his Psalms he is sometimes interpreting dark and doubtful texts. Our object is to show, that by this open admission of one of the greatest hymn writers the world has ever seen, these compositions ought never to be confounded with the inspired truth they either condense or paraphrase; that they ought never to be used as authoritative expositions of any text or portion of Scripture; and, above all, that they should never be regarded as partaking, in any degree, of the peculiar sanctity which belongs to the Bible. Their use in public worship as the most appropriate expression of our praise, like the use of liturgies as the channels and embodiments of our supplications, all but inevitably leads to their being so associated in the mind with the Scriptures that are read, and the God that is worshipped, that they imperceptibly get exalted into a position which by no means belongs to them.

We are not among those who imagine that verse is an unfit vehicle for religious thought; or that because poetry appeals to the imagination, while religion must be exhibited just as it is—suppression and addition equally corrupting it,—that therefore it can supply nothing to the mind; for surely it is a noble task 'to celebrate in glorious and lofty hymns the throne and equipage of God's almightiness, and what He works, and what He suffers to be wrought with high Providence in His Church.' But when we remember how greatly this faculty has been abused—how 'Milton's *Paradise Lost*' is commonly read and quoted as

if it were an inspired production,—a true picture of God's dealings with the children of men; how Dante's great poem has long been both the source and support of all those coarse and material conceptions relative to future punishment, which at once harden and darken men's minds, and dishonour God; how even a modern production, such as Pollok's 'Course of Time,' is in hundreds, perhaps in thousands, of Scottish households venerated as a true exposition of the Divine Word,—we cannot but feel that there is *some* force in Dr. Johnson's saying, that 'religious truth is too sacred for fiction, too simple for eloquence, and too majestic for ornament.'

Never should it be forgotten that 'all the subjects of Divine Revelation demand of us the most *sober and reverent* investigation; that whenever we meddle with them, we should eagerly and singly desire to seek for all Truth; and scrupulously reject and cast to the greatest possible distance all error; and that to make the Truth of God the subject of fanciful embellishment, however devoutly it may be done, must often tend to favour the formation of wrong ideas, impressions, and feelings.'

Let it not, then, be thought needless to lift up, on this subject, the voice of warning. For so long as thousands are much better acquainted with David's Psalms in metrical versions, than they are with the Inspired Text; and thousands more build on hymns, hopes and consolations which only ought to be built on the Bible; it can never be improper to draw attention to the danger that is involved in such a course: or to show how that which, if rightly used, is one of the highest sources of delight and spiritual profit, may, by abuse, easily become one of the most serious impediments to the understanding of Holy Scripture.



CHAPTER XXII.

ON CHURCH AUTHORITY AND THE CREEDS.

“Hear the just law—the judgment of the skies!
He that hates Truth shall be the dupe of lies:
And he that *will* be cheated, to the last
Delusions strong as Hell shall hold him fast.
For men go wrong with an ingenious skill;
Bend the straight rule to their own crooked will;
And with a clear and shining lamp supplied,
First put it out, then take it for a guide.”

COWPER.

As the decisions of the Church, relative to doctrine, are mainly embodied in ‘the Creeds,’ the subject of this chapter necessarily embraces a consideration of the value of these compositions regarded as *Expositions of Divine Truth*.

The Bishop of Oxford says, in his recent Sermons,* that God has been pleased to give us his Revelation ‘in the Volume of Inspiration, AND in the Creeds of the Church.’ He draws no distinction between these two channels, as he seems to regard them, of Divine communication.

Now it is plain that, if the Holy Spirit still illumines the Church,—if the Creeds were framed under the influence of this semi-inspiration,—if the writings of the Fathers are to be put on a level with those of the Apostles,—

* God’s Revelation Man’s Probation.

the first duty of the interpreter is to consult these ancient authorities, and his highest obligation must be obedience to their decisions.

On this subject Dr. Christopher Wordsworth has very recently delivered five Lectures in Westminster Abbey, which have since been published under the title of 'The Interpretation of the Bible.'

Many very excellent remarks occur in these Lectures, especially in relation to the temper and spirit in which the Bible should be read.

Expounding the passage, '*Open thou mine eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of thy law*' (Psa. cxix. 18), he clearly shows that 'Reason, as well as the Bible, is a precious gift of God; and that Reason is to be employed in the interpretation of Holy Writ,' if only it be used 'reasonably,'—that is, under the influence of a humble and teachable spirit. 'Vain is it,' he says, 'and worse than vain to apply learning to the study of Scripture, unless we have those *moral dispositions* and *spiritual graces*, without which our eyes are veiled. All is vain unless the soul and spirit are sanctified by the fear of God. He who would understand the Bible must love the Bible. 'The *secret* of the Lord is with them that fear Him' (Psa. xxv. 14). 'He that willeth to do God's will (ἐάν τις θελή) shall know of the doctrine' (John vii. 17). 'God revealeth His secrets unto babes,—those who are like children in simplicity,—but He hideth them from the wise and prudent' (Matt. xi. 25). 'Mysteries are revealed unto the meek.' 'Them that are meek shall He guide in judgment, and such as are gentle, them shall He learn His way' (Psa. xxv. 9).

Nothing can be better than these opening words. But unhappily, as it seems to us, they are practically set aside by the subsequent announcement that, in cases of doubt or

difficulty, the authority of the Church alone must decide as to what is Truth.

‘Jesus Christ himself,’ he adds, ‘is the great interpreter of the Bible. He does it by the presence and power of the Holy Ghost, whom He sent from heaven to abide for ever in His mystical body the Church universal, protecting Holy Scripture against false interpretations, and *declaring the true sense in her Creeds and Confessions of Faith.*’

Now, on the amount of truth or error in this statement everything turns.

It behoves us most carefully to examine it. Dr. Wordsworth fully admits that ‘the living waters of Christ’s grace flow freely to all;’ but then, he says, ‘it is only in certain rivers and channels, viz., in Holy Scripture, in the Holy Sacraments, in Prayer, and in Confirmation; we should therefore not presume that his promises will be made good to us, unless we comply with the conditions which He has annexed to them.’

Again we say,—If this teaching be true, it behoves us to *submit at once*; to bow to the authority of the Church, and to seek for the Holy Spirit *from* the Church, *through Sacraments and Confirmation*, but in connection, of course, with the study of Scripture and Prayer. If this claim, however, cannot be sustained from the Bible, it equally behoves us, at whatever risk of wounding or paining dear friends, to say in plain terms, that such a doctrine is,—ROMANISM.

‘Christ,’ says Dr. Wordsworth, ‘has given the keys to His Church, to whom He has promised His presence and His Spirit, and *whom He has appointed to be the keeper and interpreter of Holy Writ.*’ ‘Christ now declares to us the true meaning of Holy Scripture in all necessary points of Christian doctrine, in her Creeds and Confessions of Faith.’

Admitting that the Apostles had *special gifts* from Christ, which the Clergy now do not possess, he still insists that 'the power of interpreting Holy Scripture was continued to after ages.' In support of this assertion he brings forward one, and *but one text*, on which his entire argument hangs; it is this,—Christ said to His Apostles, 'Lo, I am with you alway, even to the end of the world' (Matt. xxviii. 20); *therefore*,—for this is the amount of the reasoning,—in spite of all appearances to the contrary; in spite of the absence of any proof which is capable of being weighed; in spite of clerical discords and confusions innumerable; in spite of past history and of present experience; in spite of eyes, and ears, and senses, this doctrine, like that of Transubstantiation, is to be believed as transcendental; directly supported, indeed, by the authority only of a *particular interpretation* of a single text, but supposed to be implied in all God's dealings with His Church.

Dr. Wordsworth *tests*, so to speak, the truth of his views by the history of the production of the Creed published at Nicæa, A.D. 325, and known amongst us as 'the Nicene Creed.' He says, 'We revere that Creed because we know it to have been framed by holy men, *who had many advantages which we do not possess for the right interpretation of the New Testament.*

This is supposed to have been the case,—

'(1) Because the language in which the New Testament was written was the native tongue of the authors of the Creed.

'(2) Because they possessed (so it is said) many ancient writings penned by Apostolic men, which are not now extant, and which served for the elucidation of the New Testament.

'(3) Because abundant spiritual graces were shed upon the Church *in the age* when that Creed was framed.

‘(4) Because those holy men had contended valiantly for the faith in times of persecution; had been in daily peril of death; and had the most urgent motives to examine and ascertain the truth.

‘(5) Because they employed the helps of mutual conference and deliberation; because they came together from various parts of Christendom, and were more than three hundred in number.

‘(6) Because they brought with them from their several Churches a true report of the doctrines which had been received by those Churches from the holy Apostles; because they prayed devoutly for the Divine illumination of the Holy Ghost upon their deliberations; because they placed the Bible before them as the chart and compass of their counsels; and because they *agreed* in their judgment, and delivered that Creed to future generations, and joined with one heart and voice in professing it, and declared it to be the true sense of Holy Scripture, which the primitive Churches of Christendom had received from Jesus Christ.’

‘Yet further,’ he adds, ‘we receive the Nicene Creed because we know that when it had been framed and promulgated at such a time, by such persons, and in such a manner, it was forthwith *accepted* by the Church Universal, which is the mystical body of Christ.’

Such is the argument in favour of Church authority in the interpretation of Scripture.

Incline our hearts, O Lord, we beseech Thee, to receive with childlike affection the pure milk of the Word; and so deliver us from the traditions of men, and the delusions of Satan, that we may not be led astray from the simplicity that is in Christ; but, ever abiding under the shadow of Thy wing, may be kept from all evil, through the merits and mediation of Jesus Christ our Lord.



CHAPTER XXIII.

THE COUNCIL OF NICE.

IN reply to 'the case' on behalf of Nicene teaching, which we have endeavoured in the preceding chapter to state fairly and fully, we propose, *first*, to consider *the elements* of which the Council of Nice was composed; and *next*, to endeavour to estimate *the result* of its labours, so far as its conclusions have come down to us.

For this purpose, we shall avail ourselves of that living picture of the assembly which has been furnished by Dr. Stanley in his admirable Lectures on the Eastern Church.

We find *there*, that while the Council included many who had suffered in pagan persecutions, it consisted of Arians as well as Orthodox; 'the learned and the illiterate; courtiers and peasants; old and young; aged bishops, on the verge of the grave, and beardless deacons, just entering on their office.'

Among the assembled multitude we observe Arius, 'a strange, captivating, moon-struck giant,' who in Alexandria had 'a following of seven hundred religious ladies;' Athanasius, the small and insignificant deacon, hardly twenty-five years of age, who 'rivets the attention of the assembly by the vehemence of his arguments;' Eusebius, 'the father of ecclesiastical history,' whom Athanasius is convinced is

at heart an Arian ; ‘ Egyptian hermits from their cells,— half savage, wild, and mangled by the torments they had endured ; scholars from the more civilized cities of Syria, and wild ascetics from the remoter East.’

Over this motley assembly presided the Emperor Constantine, who, on his arrival, found himself literally overwhelmed with parchment rolls or letters containing complaints and petitions against each other, from the larger part of the assembled bishops ; which, when accusations and recriminations were bandied to and fro in the Imperial presence, he wisely burnt before them all, declaring that he had not even read them.

The charges, says Dr. Stanley, were, among others, that of gross licentiousness. Constantine’s observation on them was,—‘ Never let the faults of men in their consecrated offices be publicly known, to the scandal and temptation of the multitude. Even though I were, with my own eyes, to see a bishop in the act of gross sin, I would throw my purple robe over him, that no one might suffer from the sight of such a crime.’

The Emperor, ‘ always careful of his appearance, was so on this occasion in an eminent degree. His long hair, false or real, was crowned with the Imperial diadem of pearls. His purple or scarlet robe blazed with precious stones and gold embroidery. He was shod, no doubt, in the scarlet shoes then confined to the Emperors, now perpetuated in the Pope and Cardinals. We may well believe that the simple and the worldly both looked upon him, as we are told they did, as though he were an angel of God descended straight from Heaven.’

And yet this man—often a preacher to thousands, ‘ who cheered him lustily’—was a semi-pagan, and subsequently the murderer of his son, his nephew, and his wife.

‘Incredible as it may seem to our notions,’ says Dr. Stanley, speaking of him at a later period, ‘he who had five-and-twenty years ago been convinced of the Christian faith: he who had opened the first General Council of the Church; he who had called himself a Bishop of Bishops; he who had joined in the deepest discussions of theology; he who had preached to rapt audiences; he who had established Christianity as the religion of the empire; he who had been considered by Christian bishops an inspired oracle, and an apostle of Christian wisdom, was, although now on his deathbed, himself not yet received into the Christian Church. He was not yet baptized; he had not even been received as a catechumen.’

Such was Constantine, the president of the Council of Nice. What must the Bishops have been who regarded this man as ‘an inspired oracle, and an apostle of Christian wisdom’? And yet *this* is the Council which Dr. Wordsworth tells us *specially* enjoyed the presence of Christ; through which ‘He declares to us the true sense of the Bible with regard to the fundamental articles of the Christian faith,’ and by whose decisions ‘the most unlettered peasant is able to discriminate truth from falsehood!’

Let us next see what the *decisions* of the Council, as embodied in the Creed, really amount to.

For this purpose we cannot do better than compare ‘the Nicene Creed,’ as it stands in the Communion Service, with that which is known under the title of ‘the Apostles Creed,’ as found in the service of the Morning Prayer, and see *precisely* what we have gained.

The result is embodied in these words relating to the Lord Jesus,—‘*Begotten of His Father before all worlds, God of God, Light of Light, Very God of very God, Begotten, not*

made, Being of one substance with the Father, By whom all things were made.'

And now we would seriously ask any thoughtful and pious person to estimate the value of these words, and then to say honestly and truthfully whether he can find anything in them that helps him to understand—as Dr. Wordsworth says they do—‘the true sense of the Bible with regard to the fundamental articles of the Christian Faith’? whether he can discover anything in them which will ‘enable every man, yes, even the simplest child and most unlettered peasant, to discriminate truth from falsehood, and to understand the Bible aright in those heavenly doctrines which are necessary to everlasting salvation’?

We profess an utter inability to do this. To us, the words in question appear to be little better than an attempt to be *wise above that which is written*; to *explain* truths which are *above* reason, and, therefore, inexplicable by mortal faculties; and to attach an importance to *modes* of thought and expression, which, in Scripture, belongs only to a *heartfelt* reception of the Divine Testimony.

Nothing can be plainer than that the men who thought and wrote in these scholastic terms, had lost the *simplicity* of the Gospel; that there was *presumption* in their decisions; and that nothing could justify them in *pronouncing* the Son to be ‘of one substance with the Father,’ or *pretending to distinguish* between the Son as ‘begotten,’ and the Holy Ghost as ‘proceeding.’ We should not like to say how near so irreverent a procedure approached to blasphemy.

It may not be amiss to inquire further, ‘What was *the effect* of these transactions, at the time, on the Christian community at large?’

Dr. Stanley shall tell us.

‘When we perceive,’ he says, ‘the abstract questions on which the controversy in the Council turned; when we reflect that they related not to any dealings of the Deity with man; not even, properly speaking, to the Divinity or Humanity of Christ, nor to the doctrine of the Trinity (for all these points were acknowledged by both parties), but to the ineffable relations of the Godhead before the remotest beginnings of time, it is difficult to conceive that, by inquiries such as these, the *passions* of mankind should be roused to fury.’

‘Yet so it was. So violent were the discussions that they were parodied in the pagan theatres. Sailors, millers, and travellers sang the disputed doctrines at their occupations, or on their journeys. Every corner, every alley of the cities of Alexandria and Constantinople was full of these discussions,—the streets, the market places, the drapers’, the money changers’, the victuallers’. Ask a man ‘How many oboli?’ he answers by dogmatizing on generated and ungenerated being. Inquire the price of bread, and you are told, ‘The Son is subordinate to the Father.’ Ask if the bath is ready, and you are told, ‘The Son arose out of nothing.’

Is it possible to conceive of a state of things,—corrupt and immoral as society then was,—more lamentable? Yet *this* is the age to which we are told to look back with affection as *pre-eminently Christian*; the age on which Dr. Wordsworth tells us ‘abundant spiritual graces were shed.’

The *supposition* lying at the root of all these notions about the light and piety of the Nicene age is, that the Holy Spirit *enlightens* men apart from purifying them; that there is a grace of the Spirit not mentioned by St. Paul, which, as St. Basil says, ‘plays through the intellectual faculties;’ that by this grace, which is supposed to be

official in character, Truth is discerned ; that although still ours, it was *pre-eminently* enjoyed by the Fathers ; and that, consequently, an assembly of clergy was then, and is still, the best channel for arriving at Christian Truth.

That is the theory. This particular Council becomes the illustration, not merely because the eminent divine to whom we have referred *stakes*, so to speak, the value of Church authority upon its decisions ; but because the Professor of Ecclesiastical History in the University of Oxford has so recently furnished us with a true picture of its composition and character.

On a review of the whole, we affirm that the Nicene Fathers, instead of having more, *had not half* the advantages we possess for interpreting Scripture aright ; that the mere fact of their having spoken Greek is, by every scholar, regarded as a matter of very little moment indeed ; that there is not the slightest evidence that they had access to any ancient writings by *Apostolic* men which we do not possess ; that instead of 'abundant spiritual grace' being shed upon the Church in the Nicene age, it was a period distinguished by darkness, ignorance, and superstition ; that the mere fact of many of the bishops there present having suffered persecution, is no reason for supposing that they had more urgent motives to examine and ascertain the truth than we have ; that the circumstance of three hundred men assembling, bearing with them the vague traditions of their respective neighbourhoods, is no proof whatever that they knew more than we do about what was believed in the Apostolic Churches ; that prayer for Divine illumination, offered as it was under the delusion that Christ was with the clergy *officially*, must be regarded in precisely the same light as the prayer which is now offered in Rome day by day, by the Pope and Cardinals, for the

preservation of the Papacy ; and finally, that the acceptance of the Creed by future ages, *enforced* as such acceptance has always been by secular power, and the offer of worldly advantage, has nothing whatever to do either with its truth or falsehood, its wisdom or its folly.

The lesson we have to learn is, that no man can honestly and candidly read his Bible who allows himself to be influenced, in his judgment of its teaching, by the decisions of priests and monks who happen to have lived twelve or fifteen hundred years ago ; and who, whatever piety they might possess, were unquestionably, and *as a rule*, under the influence of dark and bewildering superstitions.*

* These very Nicene Fathers proposed (with a view, as it is said, to the reformation of manners) that a rule should be established requiring all bishops, priests, deacons, and sub-deacons, who had married before their ordination, to withdraw from their wives ; a law which was very near being carried.—*Taylor's "Ancient Christianity."*





CHAPTER XXIV.

GENERAL PRINCIPLES.

LEAVING Dr. Wordsworth, the Council of Nice, and the particular text on which Church authority is ordinarily based, let us now inquire whether there are indications *in any part* of Scripture that it ever was the design of God that divine teaching should be subjected to professional interpretation; or that it *ever was* the duty of a simple-minded follower of truth,—Jew or Gentile,—to *rely* on the expositions of either Priest or Levite, Rabbi or Scribe?

That, under the Jewish economy, the Priests were commanded to ‘teach the children of Israel all the statutes which the Lord had spoken unto them by the hand of Moses,’ is clear (Lev. x. 11); that these ministers held a Divine Commission, and were descended in unbroken succession from the first High Priest, appointed by God himself, is certain; that they had, through Moses, a promise almost identical in terms with that given to the Apostles by the Saviour, cannot be disputed,—‘The Lord thy God, He it is that doth go with thee; He will not fail thee, nor forsake thee’ (Deut. xxxi. 6);—a promise repeated by the Prophets as stretching onwards through all their history (Isa. xli. 10, 11), and appropriated in each succeeding generation by the men who sat in ‘Moses’ seat.’

The question is,—Did all these advantages combined, viz., a Divinely appointed priesthood,—a command to teach,—an unbroken succession,—and an everliving promise—justify on the part of the Jewish hierarchy a claim to interpret Old Testament Scripture, or warrant a simple-minded Israelite in casting the responsibility of deciding betwixt truth and error upon his religious guides?

Let the history of that people answer. So far as they *did* follow these professional instructions, they were, *as a rule*, misled and deceived. So far as they abandoned their guidance, and listened to the voice of the irregular teachers raised up by God from amidst the laity, they prospered.

What precise lesson is intended to be taught by the fact, that 'under the ancient Theocracy, and again throughout the whole period of the Hebrew Monarchy, the most noted of those 'holy men of old, by whom God spake unto the Fathers,'—Isaiah, Jonah, Amos, Joel, Hosea, Nahum, Micah, Zephaniah, Habakkuk, Obadiah, Haggai, Zechariah, Daniel, and Nehemiah, were neither Priests nor of priestly families, we do not profess to know; but the fact that the men chosen of God to be the *inspired* teachers of the people were, for the most part, altogether independent of the Hierarchy, is surely *proof positive* that the interpretation of Scripture was not intrusted to the Priesthood.

It may be said, that the Levites were specially appointed to 'teach Jacob the judgments, and Israel the Law' of God (Deut. xxxiii. 10); that for this purpose, lest their minds should be distracted with worldly cares, no portion of the Land of Canaan was allotted to them; and that they sometimes took up their residences in the houses of the

rich, and acted both as Priests and instructors of the children (Judg. xvii. 9).

This is quite true. But then it must be borne in mind that this teaching referred chiefly, if not entirely, to ceremonial observances, in relation to which the Levite was an absolute authority. On this point the word of God is explicit: 'Take heed in the plague of leprosy, that thou observe diligently, and do according to all that the Priests the Levites shall teach you: as I commanded them, so ye shall observe to do' (Deut. xxiv. 8).

The work of the Levite, as expounded in Scripture, was threefold; it consisted in explaining the Ceremonial Law in doubtful cases,—in solving difficulties which might occur in dealings between man and man,—and in deciding controversies (disputes) among the people (2 Chron. xix. 8). There is nothing whatever to show that either Priest or Levite had the slightest authority to interpret Prophecy, or to decide upon the teachings of Moses, so far as these related to things moral and spiritual.

The rise, at a later period, of Rabbis or Doctors, and the worship of the Synagogue, does not at all interfere with this conclusion. On the contrary, the 'vain traditions' of the former,—so strongly denounced by our Lord,—and the freedom of exposition which prevailed in the latter (Matt. iv. 23; Luke iv. 16—20; Acts xiii. 14—16), indicate that it was the *duty*, as it was also the *privilege*, of the Israelite to judge for himself as to the meaning of the written Word.

That there was among the Jews a strong party who clung to Church Authority and Traditional teaching, is unquestionable. Paul, before his conversion, was one of this class. He was a devout man, and an earnest believer in the Old Testament Scriptures; but he *read* them only by the light

of the Church of his fathers, and he *acted* only in harmony with the instructions of its ministers (Acts xxii. 3—5). The result we know. Under the delusion that he was doing right in being thus guided by the Priests, he was led to engage in a work, the thought of which filled him, to the day of his death, with remorse and shame.*

Wherein was his error? It lay undoubtedly in transferring to others a responsibility which could in reality belong only to himself. His mind was *prejudiced*. He was, in relation to Christianity, uncandid, and unfair. There were some things about the religion of Jesus which he disliked, and so he would listen to no argument in its favour. He thought that, instead of maintaining the perpetuity of the Law, Christianity dishonoured it. Had he examined more closely, he would have seen that his prejudices were unfounded, and that Christ, instead of degrading Judaism, was its perfection and its end, 'witnessed to both by the Law and the Prophets' (Rom. iii. 21).

But why should he trust himself in any such investigation, when he had the anointed Priests of God,—the true interpreters of Scripture,—on his side?

So he argued; and so he erred.

Before his conversion he leaned implicitly on his spiritual advisers; *after* that great change, he recognised the higher duty of comparing their injunctions with the revealed will of God.

And what he did we are taught to do.

'These' (the Bereans) 'were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the Word with all readiness of mind, and searched the Scriptures daily, whether those things were so' (Acts xvii. 11).

'Prove all things; hold fast that which is good' (1 Thess. v. 21).



CHAPTER XXV.

ON SHADOWS OF THE PAST, AS AFFECTING THE INTERPRETATION OF SCRIPTURE.

“ A glory gilds the sacred page,
Majestic like the sun ;
It gives a light to every age,
It gives, but *borrow*s none.”

COWPER.

WE have already drawn attention to the importance of regarding, in connection with our interpretations of Scripture, the *circumstances* under which the words contained in any given passage were uttered ; the *persons* to whom they were addressed ; and the *impression* they were intended to leave on those who first heard or read them. We have also referred to various perversions of Scripture which, at different periods, have found, and still find, an imaginary support, through the unauthorized projection into the present, of texts which exclusively belong to the past.

We propose now, briefly to refer,—and chiefly by way of example,—to some of the *forms* in which the shadows of departed ages still fall over us, and in doing so, bias our interpretation of the Word of God.

The *first* we shall notice occurs in the Ordination Service of the Church of England, in which the Bishop, laying

hands on the candidate for the ministry, thus addresses him,—‘Receive the Holy Ghost for the office and work of a Priest in the Church of God, now committed unto thee by the imposition of our hands.’

The introductory *words* are those of our Lord when, meeting His Apostles after His resurrection, He breathed on them, and said, ‘Receive ye the Holy Ghost’ (John xx. 22.)

The *interpretation*—implied, though not expressed—is, that these words were, so to speak, the formula by which Christ constituted the Twelve to be the founders of His Church; and that therefore they are, to say the least, *appropriate* words in which to set apart its ministers.

Dr. Archer Butler, one of the ablest advocates of Church principles, regards the ‘breathing’ of the Lord, which accompanied the words when first uttered, as ‘imparting’ to the Apostles ‘a new life;’ and we presume, therefore, that Churchmen hold that the same declaration,—when made in what they regard as God’s appointed order, and by those to whom He has given authority to ordain,—warrants the expectation that, in connection with the prayers by which it is accompanied, and the faith supposed to be exercised, a ‘breathing’ from on high of spiritual blessing may descend upon the Presbyter, and qualify him for the work he has to do.

We admit that this interpretation is sanctioned by the traditions of at least eight centuries; but we cannot therefore allow that it is worthy of acceptance. There is not a shadow of evidence for the assertion that the blessing communicated to the Apostles at the time referred to was a *spiritual* one. The unquestionable fact, that after this they continued in Jewish darkness, and that it was not until Pentecost that they became qualified for the service they had to undertake, alone *disproves* any such supposi-

tion. It is equally plain that the gift then bestowed was of another character, viz., the power of 'remitting or retaining' those special inflictions on account of sin, and so of the sin itself, which throughout their career they so largely exercised (Acts v. 1—11; xiii. 11; 1 Cor. iv. 21; v. 3—5).

The interpretation *implied* in the Ordination Service is but a *shadow of the past*.

We are quite aware that many Church writers affirm that the words in question, as uttered by the Bishop, are not a declaration, but a prayer. Mr. Gell, on the contrary, and those who with him advocate Liturgical Revision, insist, and, as we think, have *demonstrated*, that the words must be understood in the sense of *actually imparting* the Divine gift, and not as a prayer that it may be received. With this controversy, however, as belonging only to Churchmen, we have here nothing to do.

The *second* instance we shall take from the 'Communion Service,' or rather from the 'Exhortation' directed to be read by the minister at the time of celebration. In that address the people are warned against receiving the Supper of the Lord unworthily in these words,—'For then we kindle God's wrath against us; we provoke him to plague us with divers diseases, and sundry kinds of death.'

The text here, by implication, *interpreted* as having a literal bearing upon ourselves, is obviously that which is found in the First Epistle to the Corinthians (xi. 30), where the Apostle says, 'For this cause' (*i.e.*, on account of the gross abuses then connected with the administration of the Lord's Supper), 'many are weak and sickly among you, and many sleep.'

But will any one deny that the passage (taken *literally*, and as implying the actual infliction of *bodily* disease)

belongs exclusively to that Apostolic and *miraculous* Church discipline which, in all human probability, ceased when the last man died on whom the last of the Apostles (John) had laid hands? He can hardly do so, in face of the revealed fact that persons who had received power from the Apostles to work miracles, *could not transmit* the gift to others. The experience of Philip at Samaria (Acts viii. 14—17) seems to demonstrate this.

Here, then, seems to be drawn the line where miracle ceases; and therefore the line which separates *inspired, or semi-inspired teaching* from that of ordinary men.

For ourselves, we should attach much weight to any teaching which could be authenticated as that of a man on whom St. John had laid hands, and we should be prepared to listen respectfully to any evidence that might be offered in favour of a supposed miracle, if wrought during the first half of the Second Century. But beyond that time we should turn a deaf ear to all such pretensions.

In relation to the text now under notice, we would simply ask any clergyman, High or Low, whether, in his heart of hearts, he really believes that an unworthy taking of the Lord's Supper is *likely* to involve the sudden disease or premature death of the sinning communicant? Probably no one would be prepared to answer in the affirmative. Why, then, are the words retained? Simply because they come to us as a tradition of centuries,—a sacred shadow of the past.

Our *third* example shall be taken from a volume entitled 'Subordinate Standards and other Authoritative Documents of the Free Church of Scotland,' published by authority of the General Assembly in 1851.

Here, extraordinary as it may seem, we find a Nonconformist community, differing in no respect whatever in its

origin from other Nonconformist bodies,—a community regarded by the Church of England as *no Church at all*,—its ‘orders irregular, its mission the offspring of division, and its Church system, if not schism, at least *dichostasy*’ (seditious,—literally, standing apart,—Gal. v. 20), absolutely asserting that to it (*i. e.*, to its Church officers) ‘the keys of the kingdom of heaven are committed; by virtue whereof they have power respectively to remit and retain sins, to shut that kingdom against the impenitent, both by the Word and censures, and to open it unto penitent sinners by the ministry of the Gospel, and by absolution from censures, as occasion shall require.’*

We naturally ask, ‘On what text is this claim founded?’ And again the reply is, ‘On the words uttered by the Lord to His Apostles after His resurrection,—‘Whose soever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them; and whose soever sins ye retain, they are retained’ (John xx. 23).

The *interpretation*—implied, though not expressed—is, that the words in question communicated, not to the Apostles only, but to the ministers of the Gospel through all time, the power of including or excluding men from the visible Church.

But is this the fact?

We should seriously question whether any man—minister or layman—can be found who would deliberately answer, Yes! Yet *there* the claim stands, ‘to be enforced by the Church like her other laws,’ simply because it embodies a tradition of centuries, and is an honoured shadow of the past.

Further, and perhaps more striking examples still, of the influence of these shadows may be found in the ‘Form of Church Government’ and ‘Directory’ of the same body.

* Confession of Faith, chap. xxx.

In these it is asserted that a blessing is especially promised 'to the prayers of a minister for the sick;' that it is *his* privilege 'to read the Scriptures in public,' because the Priests and Levites in the Jewish Church did so (Deut. xxxi. 9); that it is *his* 'to bless the people from God;' (Isa. lxvi. 21), because 'by Priests and Levites' (under the law) 'are meant' (under the Gospel) 'Evangelical Pastors;' that 'the charge and office of interpreting the Holy Scriptures is a part of the ministerial calling which none, *however otherwise qualified*, should take upon him in any place, but he that is duly called thereunto by God *and His Kirk*;' and finally, that at family worship, the *reader* of Scripture to the household should be 'approved by the minister and Session,'—that no person (except the head of the household) should be suffered, without such approval, to perform worship in families,—and that special care should be taken that each family keep by themselves, not admitting strangers. The reason given (among others) is that such meetings tend 'to the prejudice of the public ministry.'*

The *interpretations* of Scripture involved in these assumptions are so extraordinary, that if the claims founded thereupon did not stand on record in 'Authorized Documents,' it would be impossible to believe that they could have been formally re-asserted by a seceding body, abandoning church and manse alike, in order to render what they regarded as a needful testimony in favour of the sole headship of Christ in His Church.

We could easily multiply our instances; for as an eminent Dissenter, who has candour enough to judge justly and courage to say what he thinks, has expressed it,—'With all their professions, and in spite of their repudiation of human authority, there are among the sects

* Form of Church Government, p. 387. Directory, p. 409.

modes of legally uniting income and office to questionable opinions, which are not without results on the mental uprightness, the freedom, happiness, and self-respect of (other) Nonconformists'—than the particular body to which we have referred.

But we refrain. Every step is *an offence*. Men hear with something like satisfaction of 'a mote' in their brother's eye; but they become for ever alienated from the man who dares to hint at the possibility of 'a beam' being in their own eye.

Yet is the duty of pointing out such hindrances in the study of Scripture not altogether to be neglected. For anger, in a Christian breast, is shortlived, and will soon pass away; but Truth is eternal. We speak, therefore, in the hope that in some thoughtful hour, better feelings will prevail; and then it may, perhaps, be both discovered and acknowledged, that, more or less, the shadows of the past fling themselves across all of us. And although we may each fondly imagine that, in our own case, they fall but slightly or partially, it is well to remember that 'a very small object, *close to the eye*, will darken the earth, and hide the sun.'

Almighty and everliving God, pitifully look upon our infirmities, we beseech Thee; and so deliver us from all darkness of mind, formality, and superstition, that, discerning clearly the true meaning of Thy Holy Word, we may, with all fidelity of heart, cleave thereto, through Jesus Christ our Lord.



CHAPTER XXVI.

ON PRIVATE JUDGMENT IN THE INTERPRETATION OF SCRIPTURE.

“Come lowly : He will help thee. Lay aside
That subtle, first of evils—human pride.
Fear nought but sin ; love all but sin ; and learn
How that in all things else, thou may'st discern
His forming, His creating power—how bind
Earth, self, and brother to th' Eternal mind.”

DANA.

PRIVATE judgment, properly understood, simply means
PERSONAL RESPONSIBILITY.

In the exercise of this responsibility, a man may, if he think fit, accept, with or without question, the decisions of Rome,—the conclusions of the Fathers,—the dogmas of the Puritans,—the speculations of Rationalists, or the current opinions which belong to the religious circle in which he has been educated, or may, at any given time, happen to move. But, in each and every case, his conduct is an act of private judgment, for the wisdom or folly of which, with all its attendant consequences, he is alone and individually answerable.

Private judgment, thus viewed, implies a twofold obligation ; viz., *first*, that of a patient and diligent use of *all* the means placed within our reach for ascertaining Truth ;

and *secondly*, the cultivation of those dispositions of heart which are favourable to spiritual discernment, and apart from which no man can rightly discriminate between Truth and Error.

The *former* will include in the case of those who have an opportunity to investigate, a thankful appreciation of the labours of scholars, in relation both to the text and to the translation of Holy Scripture; and an examination of the Commentaries of pious and learned men, so far as they may seem to us to be truthful and unprejudiced expositions of Holy Writ: the *latter*, as graces of the Spirit, must be sought, where alone they can be obtained, at the footstool of Him who is the giver of every good and perfect gift.

To these we would add, a reverent listening to that voice of the Church which expresses itself in the lives and labours of holy men in all ages; a voice, which is not the voice of the Priest, or the voice of a party, or the voice of the schoolmen, or the voice of the Fathers, whether Greek or Latin, or the voice of England or Scotland,—Evangelical or Arminian, high or low, broad or exclusive; but that great silent testimony which issues, through all time, from Apostles and Prophets, from Martyrs and Confessors, from poor and rich, from the palace and the peasant's cot, from the ignorant and the learned, from the living and the dead;—witnessing evermore to the truth of Christ's holy Gospel,—to its influence over mankind,—to its triumphs over the world,—to its sole and exclusive power to enlighten, to solace, to sustain and to save. Wretched indeed is the sophistry which would confound this sublime echo of the human heart responding to the Divine, with the decisions of a Council, or the dicta of a sect.

Research, properly speaking, is an obligation which can

rest only on *the few*; but the cultivation of candour, charity, humility, truthfulness, and dependence,—whatever, in short, brings us into that moral sympathy with God and goodness which is essential to the recognition of excellence, *whether in Scripture or in life*, is the duty of every child of Adam. That *moral* qualities alone are fully adequate to the discernment of Truth in Religion is evident from the words of St. John, who, writing to persons who were unlearned, says,—‘Little children, there are many Antichrists, —many deceivers are entered into the world. Believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they be of God. Ye have an unction from the Holy One, and ye know all things. The anointing which ye have received abideth in you; and ye need not that any man teach you’ (1 John ii. 18, 20, 27; iv. 1; 2 John ver. 7).

The force and truthfulness of these words of the aged Apostle have been verified in all ages. Up to the present hour, the noblest examples of simple faith and piety are to be found, not among the learned, but among the poor and the suffering; among Negro slaves; in peasant’s huts; in spots where controversy never comes; and among persons to whom if it reached them, it would be but as the jargon of an unknown tongue.

The question, whether this believing ‘*with the heart* unto righteousness,’ as St. Paul terms it (Rom. x. 9, 10), be ‘Faith,’ or not, is the turning-point of dispute between those who attach a high importance to Creeds, and those who do not. The difference may not always be openly avowed; but it invariably *affects* the reasoning on either side.

Dr. Manning, in his recent lectures ‘On the Grounds of Faith,’ puts the matter *more distinctly* perhaps, but scarcely more decidedly, than *he* would have done when an Arch-deacon in the English Church. ‘Faith,’ says he, ‘implies

knowledge; and all knowledge, worthy of the name, must be *definite*. The faith we confess in our Creed must be *understood*, both in its substance and in its letter,—the explicit and the implicit meaning, article by article,—and it must be *expressed* in terms as definite, severe, and precise, as any problem in Science.'

Further, he adds, 'Knowledge must also be *certain*. It must not only be true; it must be Truth with its evidence, illuminating the intelligence; or, in other words, the intelligence possessed by Truth with its evidence.'

'This kind of certainty,' he says, and truly enough, cannot be attained by the ignorant, since they are unable to pursue the trains of thought needful to arrive at it; nor can it be attained by the learned, since, apart from the authority of the Church, it is absolutely unattainable.' Hence, he argues, 'the Pope, as the representative of Christ, is the sole arbiter of Truth;' he that heareth the Pope heareth Christ, and he that despises the Pope despises Christ.

Our reply to all this is, that 'the Faith' he describes, is *not the Faith of the New Testament*; that as such a belief can have little or nothing to do with the state of the heart, no man can be the better for it; and that since it is only to be exercised by subjection to another mind, it is but a *shifting* of all responsibility in relation to Truth, from the individual sinner to the supposed infallible Church. It therefore destroys alike, personality and probation.

Dr. Manning adds, as an unanswerable argument in favour of Romanism,—*The Catholic Faith makes people happy*.

We shall not dispute the assertion. Human nature *craves* for infallibility in religious matters, and it is a happiness, we doubt not, even to think that we have secured it.

This craving, Dr. Whately has truly observed, is the fruitful source both of superstition and Atheism; but it is incessant in some minds. God has, however, not chosen to gratify it. And because He has not,—because He has thought fit to make our apprehension of Divine Truth to depend mainly on a right state of *heart*,—men of all classes quarrel with His method.

The mode in which this dissatisfaction manifests itself is various. Sometimes it is in the way of restlessness, and sometimes of mistrust. Sometimes it finds expression in a reckless scepticism, followed by a *predisposition* to listen to any Church which professes to be infallible; and sometimes it carefully bars the door against all inquiry, and refuses, under any pretext, to be disturbed.

Hence the timidity and terror which is so often manifested when any new form of religious thought is first broached in Christian circles. That which is stated may indeed be *true*, but whether it is so or not, matters little. It *seems* to introduce *an element of uncertainty* in quarters where neither doubt nor question has ever been allowed to enter, and therefore it must be disallowed.

To all such, we can only say, that for intelligent men to shrink from the investigation of Truth of any kind, however specious may be the pretext, is, in fact, to evade the most important part of their moral discipline; that he who desires Truth as the supreme good cannot fail eventually to enjoy the blessedness it brings in its train; and that he who subordinates Truth to what he calls Peace, may haply, in the end, lose both Truth and Peace.



'CHAPTER XXVII.

ON THE STUDY OF UNFULFILLED PROPHECY, AS CONNECTED
WITH THE INTERPRETATION OF SCRIPTURE GENERALLY.

“The Church has waited long
Her absent Lord to see ;
And still in loneliness she waits,
A friendless stranger she.
Age after age has gone,
Sun after sun has set,
And still in weeds of widowhood
She weeps a mourner yet.
Come, then, Lord Jesus, come !”

DR. HORACE BONAR.

IN an admirable essay ‘On the Nature and Object of Revelation,’ the late learned Dr. S. R. Maitland thus expresses himself:—

‘I was going to say,’ he remarks,—‘Let us thankfully take the Word of God, and ransack its stores,—let us search it as for hid treasure, and bend every power to find and seize on *all* that God has condescended to reveal.’

‘But what a question meets us at the very outset! I see that I must come to it, and, therefore, I may as well state it at first; ‘Have I any business to meddle with those parts of the Word of God which relate to the future? or, in other words, which consist of unfulfilled prophecy?’

Strange as it may seem, this question has been agitated in the Christian Church, and a great majority seem to have decided it in the negative.'

But here it seems necessary to state distinctly, what is included under the term 'unfulfilled prophecy.'

Under that designation, then, may be placed,—

FIRST. Those portions of the writings of the older Prophets which, although forming part of the inspired messages which were at different periods delivered to the people of Israel by Isaiah, Ezekiel, and others, clearly stretch far beyond the time when they were uttered; which obviously refer to events much further in the future than the return from the Babylonish Captivity; and which are ordinarily supposed to relate to the times of Messiah.

SECONDLY. Such incidental predictions relative to the Second Advent of Christ, or to the appearance of a 'Man of Sin,' or 'Mystery of Iniquity,' as are found in the Gospels and Epistles.

THIRDLY. The Apocalypse of St. John.

The *first* of these,—for the most part relating to Israel,—are ordinarily spiritualized, perhaps we should say *volatilized*,—by being applied, although in the most vague and general terms, to the Christian Dispensation; which, it is supposed by such interpreters, will terminate with the conversion of the world to the Redeemer, and, in so doing, fulfil the *class* of prophecies which speak of the lion lying down with the lamb, and of the knowledge of the Lord covering the earth 'as the waters cover the sea.'

The *second*, so far as they relate to the coming of Christ, are mostly supposed to find their fulfilment in the death of the Christian, which is regarded as the coming of the Lord *to him*; while those which refer to the Man of Sin are generally applied to the Church of Rome.

The *third*—the Apocalypse—is commonly abandoned as unintelligible ; *admitted*, indeed, to be Divinely inspired ; *admired* for its wondrous beauty ; *loved and honoured* as a repository of texts capable of varied application ; but *utterly disregarded* as a prophetic record of events destined to take place during the eighteen hundred or two thousand years which are to elapse between the first and second advent of the Lord.

The *common excuse* for this general neglect of later prophecy, and especially of the Apocalypse, is threefold : *first*, the supposed impossibility of attaining to anything like a satisfactory assurance as to its meaning ; *secondly*, the confusion incident to schemes of interpretation which, proceeding on no recognised principle, only contradict and neutralize each other ; and *thirdly*, a prevailing opinion that prophecy was never intended to be understood *before* its fulfilment ; that consequently such investigations, if not forbidden, are at least idle ; and that the tendency of prophetic study is to divert the mind from that which is more practical, and, perhaps, more spiritual.

We are far from denying that *some reason* has been given for these unhappy conclusions ; for too many ill-disciplined and imaginative persons have violated all propriety in their treatment of the Apocalypse ; clever, but vain men, have sought and found notoriety in ministering, through its pages, to that morbid desire to read the future which so frequently afflicts mankind ; and commentators, learned and ignorant alike, have in this, as in too many other instances, increased rather than lessened difficulties, by their ingenious inventions and conflicting conclusions.

To objectors, of all classes, we are content that Dr. Maitland should furnish a reply.

‘Knowing,’ he says, ‘that all Scripture is given by In-

spiration, and that *all* is profitable for instruction in righteousness, I think we must admit that *all* ought to be read and studied by him who professes to receive the Scriptures as the Word of God. This, indeed, I find admitted in general terms by most Christians; and I never met with any man, professing to be a disciple of Christ, who would have taken upon himself the responsibility of marking out those parts of the Bible which a Christian should omit to read. But I have met with many, who have so stated the matter, as virtually to negative all the particulars of their general admission.

‘The reader has probably met with many persons professing religion, and at the same time openly avowing that they never attempted to understand those prophecies which they consider as unfulfilled—who told him with complacency that they never studied them, and took some credit for their forbearance.

‘It is natural that such should desire to dissuade others from that which they avoid themselves; and to this end several maxims have been framed and repeated, till they have become current, and are frequently used by those who would act more honestly if they simply said that they had never attempted to understand a great part of Revealed Truth,—that they considered it a very difficult business,—that they had been so much engaged in other matters, that, far from knowing how much might be learned on such points, they had never once seriously reflected how far it was a matter, either of duty or wisdom, to see whether anything was to be learned or not.

‘On some of these maxims I would offer a few remarks, because, when they are uttered with gravity, they are apt to impose on simple readers of the Bible.

I. ‘We are sometimes told that we ought not to attempt

to pry into things which are not revealed. Why, no, to be sure; we ought not to attempt to do anything which common sense pronounces at once to be impossible. If anything is not revealed, I do not understand how we can pry into it, and it is a foolish waste of time to attempt it.

‘But will the persons who deliver this maxim undertake to say what *is* and what *is not* revealed? Unless they can do this, however magisterially they may affirm the proposition, it is altogether inconsequential; at all events, it does not apply to him who is searching the Scriptures to discover what *is* revealed; and who is not likely to find—or, if he has common understanding, to seek—what is not revealed in Revelation.

II. ‘It is urged by those who desire to dissuade from the study of prophecy, that it is not the *most* important study,—not the *most* essential,—not the *most* profitable!

‘Suppose we should grant this. Surely, if to ascertain the meaning of prophecies, which the Spirit of God has vouchsafed to give, be not the first and most important duty of man, it is at least *as* important and *as* profitable as many of the pursuits which engage those who use the argument.

‘To come to the point, however. Is it true that unfulfilled prophecies *are* among what may be termed the less profitable subjects for Christian discussion? Do not some of the subjects which are most frequently brought forward, and are considered as of the utmost importance, rest *entirely* on unfulfilled prophecy? On what ground but what he considers a right interpretation of unfulfilled prophecy, does any preacher venture to tell his hearers that they shall rise from the dead, and that the Son of God shall come to judgment? Yet these truths, resting wholly and entirely on unfulfilled prophecy, are, and ought to be published;

and if any man discourages the reader of Scripture from searching what God may have revealed on these points, by telling him that he is not to pry into futurity, not to indulge his curiosity about the fulfilment of unaccomplished prophecy, I venture to say that he does all he can to intercept the light of God's Truth, and to make His Word of none effect,—and he does it at his peril.

'The truth then seems to be, that there are some unfulfilled prophecies which Christians in general find to be profitable: and I would suggest whether, instead of saying that they do not study other prophecies because they are unprofitable, they ought not rather to say, that those prophecies are unprofitable because they do not study them?'

III. 'It is often said, 'The prophecies were not intended to make us prophets.' If these words are to be taken quite strictly, they are certainly true; and I do not know that any man ever pretended, that by studying the prophecies, he had obtained the gift of prophecy. If there has been any such person, I believe him to have been sadly mistaken.

'If, however, it is meant that prophecy was not given in order that we might foreknow and predict future events, *it is not true*. Yet, from a sort of confused mixture of these two ideas, this saying has been supposed to contain much wisdom and some wit, instead of being seen to be either a mere truism, or a barefaced falsehood.

'Let us try the truth of this statement by one or two prophecies, fulfilled and unfulfilled.

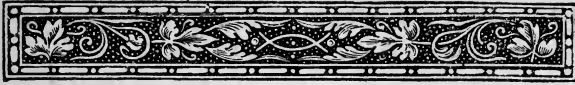
'Was the prophecy of the Deluge given only that, *after* it had been fulfilled, it might be interpreted? or was it given that men might *foreknow* the Divine purpose? When a Divine revelation had been given to Noah, in order that he might be, in the true sense of the word, a Prophet,

were those who heard him to forbear repeating his words, under pain of being sneered at as 'Prophets'?

'Again, were the prophecies of Messiah's first Advent given only that they might be interpreted by the event? Did not God vouchsafe those prophecies to gratify the curiosity (if it must be so called) of those who waited for the consolation of Israel, and to enable them to foreknow the things belonging to their peace? Were the prophecies which our Lord uttered, only to be interpreted by the event, in order that His own providence might be manifested? or did He mean His disciples to 'foreknow' that they should be beaten in synagogues, and brought before kings and rulers for His sake? Was our Lord's prophecy of false prophets only intended to show His own foreknowledge? Was not the Apocalypse given to Him, 'that He might show unto His servants things that must shortly come to pass'?

'If it be said that many who repeat this false assertion do not mean to refer to such common topics as the Resurrection and the Judgment, but to "*certain peculiar views,*" or to certain peculiar notions, I must reply that people should say what they mean; and that, if the prophecies of God were given for our learning, he must be a bold man who undertakes to decide which are worth studying, and which are not. For my own part, I am slow to believe that God has revealed anything to man which it is not worth his utmost pains to learn.'

We add nothing to these admirable words, beyond expressing our firm belief, uttered under a deep sense of responsibility, that 'to those who have made their calling and election sure,' a right understanding of the purposes of God in regard to the coming kingdom of Christ, is *the most important object to which they can direct their attention.*



CHAPTER XXVIII.

ON A RIGHT UNDERSTANDING OF THE DISPENSATION UNDER
WHICH WE LIVE.

“ Far down the ages now,
Her journey well-nigh done,
The pilgrim Church pursues her way,
In haste to reach the crown ;
The story of the past
Comes up before her view ;
How well it seems to suit her still,
Old and yet ever new !”

BONAR.

WE have more than once expressed our conviction that large portions of Scripture can never be rightly understood so long as we neglect to regard them in connection with the particular dispensation, persons, and circumstances to which they are intended to apply.

No other *admitted* truth is perhaps so generally forgotten.

The prevailing notion seems to be that, because ‘all Scripture is profitable for instruction,’ therefore all Scripture, uttered no matter when, or to whom, is immediately applicable to *our* circumstances. The folly of this notion would be obvious enough if the principle it involves were fairly carried out on all occasions. But this is never done. It is only adopted in relation to exhortations which are

repeated in other forms in the New Testament; to Types; and to Prophecies which involve *blessings*.

The point always taken for granted is, that the present is *the last* and final dispensation of God's Providence in His Church; that therefore *all* promises, made when or to whom they may, *culminate* in our experience; that,—contrary to St. Paul's express teaching (1 Cor. vii. 18),—the converted Jew is to be regarded as a Gentile; that he who is called 'being circumcised,' is to become as if 'uncircumcised;' and that all promises of glory in the latter day are to be enjoyed by the Jew, only by and through his connection with the Gentile Church.

But what if it should appear, on a more accurate examination of Scripture, that, as the *Mosaic dispensation* was one of special mercy to the Jew, so *the present* is simply what St. Paul calls it, 'the Dispensation of Grace to the Gentiles' (Ephes. iii. 2); and that, *beyond this*, there yet remains a dispensation, that of 'the fulness of times' (Ephes. i. 10), to be entered upon by all of us after the Resurrection, under which the Jew shall fully inherit the promises made to his Fathers, and the Heathen become the inheritance of the Redeemer?

It would be out of place *here* to support such a theory. Nor shall we attempt it. The only lesson we would draw from the *possibility* of its truth is, that we had better take Scripture just as we find it; and not force it from its original meaning, by applications which can be justified only on a supposition—incapable of being *proved*—that this dispensation is final and complete.

We are now dealing with the question simply with reference to *Interpretation*; and in relation thereto we feel bound to maintain, in opposition to the fancies of otherwise admirable expositors, that God's Word should be

always understood *as it stands*; as it *must* have been understood, if understood at all, by those who listened to it when it was first uttered; as it *would* be understood now, if it could be read only in the light thrown upon it by the context, and apart from any theories of our own.

To render our meaning as clear as possible, we cannot do better than *illustrate* what we have said, by reference to a text which is, as we think, frequently perverted in this way. It will at once be seen that the passage in question represents *a class*.

‘*O house of Jacob, come ye, and let us walk in the light of the Lord*’ (Isa. ii. 5).

To interpret, as is commonly done, ‘house of Jacob’ as meaning ‘the spiritual Israel,’—all that are brought to the God of Jacob, (so Matt. Henry and others);—to apply the text to *the Church of Christ*,—as if the Prophet, when speaking to the Jews, looked onward *to us*, and intended that a double application should be given to his words, is,—however excellent the intentions of the expositor,—to darken the Word of God; to deprive it of all point and force; and, under the delusive idea of thereby giving it a wider and more practical bearing, to strip it of all *definite* application whatever.

No one, of course, disputes that Christians are called upon, now and evermore, to ‘walk in the light of the Lord;’ but *why* should they not be urged to do so on the basis of the Apostolic exhortation to Gentile converts,—‘Ye were sometimes darkness, but now are ye light in the Lord: walk as children of light’ (Ephes. v. 8)? To impress the lesson, valuable as it is, from the words of the Prophet, is to *destroy* the meaning of Scripture: to do so from the words of the Apostle is to *illustrate* it; for the exhortation of Isaiah is addressed exclusively to the Jewish

nation, while that of Paul is directed to Gentiles, and so to believers in all ages.

It may be said, that the supposed impropriety of interpreting 'house of Jacob' to mean 'spiritual Israel,' is a matter of opinion.

If it were so, the objection would have little force. But it is quite otherwise. It is plain, from the verse which immediately follows, that the Prophet is not addressing the spiritual members of the Jewish Commonwealth, but the nation at large, in their national capacity; for he goes on, under the very same title—'house of Jacob' (ver. 6), to speak of them as idolatrous and disobedient, and therefore *nationally* not to be forgiven (ver. 6—9):

It may also be urged, that since the verses which *precede* the one on which we are commenting, and which speak of the nations beating their 'swords into ploughshares,' refer to the last days (ver. 2—4), they *must* belong to the Gentiles; and therefore the fifth verse may, with perfect propriety, be similarly applied.

But what authority have we for saying that what Isaiah tells us he saw 'concerning Judah and Jerusalem,' really relates to the Gentiles? that when he says the nations shall flow 'to the house of the God of Jacob,' he does not mean any such thing 'concerning Judah and Jerusalem'? or that when he declares 'that the Law shall go forth out of Zion, and the Word of the Lord from Jerusalem,' he intends the Gentile Church under this dispensation?

We take this *one* instance, only as a specimen of hundreds of others; for it is no exaggeration to affirm, that hundreds of texts are commonly interpreted in precisely the same way;—that is, without sufficiently regarding the dispensation to which they belong, and, as a rule, with grievous inattention to the circumstances under which

they were uttered, and the class to whom they were addressed.

We close by commending a few Scriptural FACTS to the careful consideration of all diligent readers of the Bible.

(1) Explain it as we may, St. Paul clearly terms this dispensation one of Grace to the Gentiles (Ephes. iii. 2) ; and as plainly speaks of one *to come*, 'the dispensation of the fulness of times' (Ephes. i. 10).

(2) The Old Testament Prophets never *hint* at a dispensation like ours;—viz., one under which, for nearly two thousand years, *delay* should take place as to the visible exaltation of Messiah. With *them*, the humiliation, and the subsequent glorification of the Redeemer, by the subjection of all men to Himself, always seem to touch each other.

(3) The first Christians, notwithstanding the teachings of their Lord to the contrary, inherited from the Prophets the expectation of the *immediate* triumph of Christ, and, for some years, lived in almost daily expectation of His Second Advent.

(4) St. Paul tells us that he received, 'by special revelation,' the knowledge of a 'mystery, which in other ages was not made known unto the sons of men' (Ephes. iii. 5) ; 'which was kept secret since the world began' (Rom. xvi. 25, 26) ; which mystery, there seems every reason to believe, *included*, in connection with the freedom of Gentile converts from Jewish rites, a communication to the effect that a long delay would take place before the Saviour's return ;—a period during which a 'mystery of iniquity' was to prevail, and a Gentile election to be gathered in.

(5) The same Apostle clearly associates the triumph of Christ *with the Resurrection*. When he quotes Isaiah's prophecy, 'Unto Him every knee shall bow, and every

tongue confess' (xlv. 23), he connects it with the day when 'every one of us shall give account of himself to God' (Rom. xiv. 11). And again, when he quotes the same Prophet as predicting a period when 'the veil that is spread over the face of all nations' shall be removed (Isa. xxv. 6—8), he, like the Prophet, looks for its fulfilment only at the Resurrection,—the period when 'Death is swallowed up in victory' (1 Cor. xv. 54).

(6) Peter, contemplating what was, even to him, the *strange fact* that, after the redemption of the world by Christ, it should still be allowed to go on as it does, explains the mystery only on the principle of its meaning *salvation*, not condemnation; '*even as Paul had taught,*' according to the wisdom given unto him, revealing, in his Epistles, some things hard to be understood (even by the Apostles themselves), which the unlearned (or rather, the unteachable) and unstable wrest, as they do the other Scriptures, unto their own destruction' (2 Pet. iii. 15, 16).

From the whole, we draw no conclusion beyond this,—that, for aught we can tell, there *may be*, nay, that there *probably* is, a dispensation to come which will explain naturally, and as they stand, those passages of Scripture which we are now so apt to twist and •turn in every direction, in the vain hope of making them accord with our preconceived notions; a dispensation which will also explain why many things in the Bible, which to us appear useless—such as the genealogies of tribes and families—have been left on record as portions of that Word, the characteristic of which is, that it '*abideth for ever.*'



CHAPTER XXIX.

ON THE USE AND MISUSE OF PARALLEL PASSAGES.

“The works of man inherit, as is just,
Their author’s frailty, and return to dust.
But Truth Divine for ever stands secure,—
Its head is guarded, as its base is sure.
Fixed in the rolling flood of endless years,
The pillar of the eternal plan appears;
The raging storm and dashing wave defies,
Built by that Architect who built the skies.”

COWPER.

THAT great advantage frequently arises from the careful study of what are considered to be *parallel texts*, will certainly not be disputed by any intelligent reader of Scripture. Sincere and deep is the gratitude every student of Scripture ought to feel to the many excellent men who, at great cost, both of time and labour, have bequeathed to us a mass of references so various and so valuable as those are, which now enrich the marginal columns of our Bibles.

Yet it cannot be denied that some of these references are misleading; that others seem to be intended rather to guide the reader to a particular view of Truth, than to help him to discover the *meaning* of the Word of God; that others relate to the *words* rather than to the spirit of the passage to which they are affixed; and that all, even when judiciously selected, do great harm *if they lead*

the reader away from the context, and cause him to rely for light rather on a variety of fragmentary passages, scattered up and down over the passages of Holy Writ, than on the connected reasoning of the Apostle or Evangelist who may be writing. Where caution, in this respect, is neglected or despised, the result must be disastrous; for parallel passages then merely take the form of a very imperfect and disjointed commentary; are, if simply verbal, quite as likely to delude as to enlighten; and, if otherwise, can furnish but a very partial insight into the meaning of any particular text.

The great point to be aimed at, in our endeavours to understand Scripture aright, is to ascertain, first of all, the meaning of *the words*; then, by very careful observation, *the connection* in which they stand, and the relation they bear to what has gone before, or comes after; then to consider the *circumstances* under which they were uttered or written,—the *persons* to whom they were addressed, and the impressions they obviously left, or were intended to leave, on those who first read them, or actually listened to the living voice of the speaker. If this be done carefully and accurately, the reader will soon become familiar with *the spirit* as well as the words of Scripture, and will be in little danger of falling into any important error, as to the lessons intended to be imparted by the sacred writer.

The value of a parallel passage is, as a rule, to be measured by the degree in which it possesses a *suggestive* character. It then serves to stimulate research, and to indicate *the direction* in which additional light may probably be obtained. For this end, merely *verbal* references are often useful; but, of course, only on the supposition that, in each case, care is taken to ascertain the sense in which a particular word may, in any given passage, be

used; for in Scripture, as in other books, the same word is often used in various senses, and in all such cases the *true* sense can only be discovered by observing the connection in which it stands.

No reasonable person can doubt for a moment that, in order to ascertain the meaning of *particular portions* of Scripture,—to see it, so to speak, on all sides,—it is absolutely necessary to keep in mind *the tenor of the whole book*. We always take this course in interpreting a merely human composition, even though it be but a letter from a friend; and it is equally necessary to follow it in reading an *inspired* epistle. The character of the writer,—his known sentiments,—what he has said elsewhere,—all go to explain a doubtful passage, when it occurs even in the most familiar correspondence. How much more is it necessary to keep the character and object of God's entire Revelation in mind, when interpreting any part of Scripture!

Had the Jews done this, they would not have fallen into the grievous mistakes they did relative to the Messiahship of the Lord.

'We have heard out of the Law,' said they to Jesus, 'that Christ *abideth for ever*: and how sayest thou, The Son of Man must be lifted up' (crucified) (John xii. 34)? They were so far right. Isaiah *had* said so (ix. 7). So had Daniel (vii. 14).

But was that *all* that either of these Prophets had said about the Redeemer? Certainly not. Isaiah had clearly foretold His sufferings and death (chap. liii.); and Daniel had said distinctly that 'after threescore and two weeks, Messiah should be 'cut off,' but 'not for Himself.'

Here, then, is an instance in which the neglect to notice the *entire* teaching led into error. In the case both of Isaiah and of Daniel, the two *apparently* contradictory

passages should have been each and equally regarded; both should have been humbly received and carefully pondered; and patience should have found her perfect work in watching and waiting for their full and harmonious accomplishment in God's own time.

So with ourselves. Some persons are greatly stumbled when they read that David, with all his sinfulness, is called, both in the Old Testament and in the New, 'a man after God's own heart' (1 Sam. xiii. 14; Acts xiii. 32). A reference to another portion of the same Prophet (1 Sam. ii. 35) relieves the difficulty; for *there*, referring to David, God is represented as saying, 'I will raise me up a faithful priest, who shall do according to that which is in mine heart,'—a passage which at once suggests the *primary* meaning of the text first quoted—viz., that David, in his public and official conduct, should fulfil the Divine will, and maintain inviolate the laws which God had enjoined.

This, as a rule, he did. In two striking instances, however, he failed to obey—viz., in the cases of Shimei and of Joab. He confesses, on his death-bed, to Solomon, that in these instances he had not acted as he ought to have done as the ruler of the nation; and he leaves these men to be dealt with, so far as it could be done without injustice, by Solomon. Each of them, by a *subsequent* violation of the law, brought judgment on his own head, and died justly.

Again, in the case of Balaam. Reading merely the account given of him in the Book of Numbers (chap. xxiii. and xxiv.), one might be led to doubt whether he should be regarded as a bad man, or merely as a very imperfect and erring Prophet. But the Apostles deliver us from this difficulty. Peter tells us that covetousness was Balaam's ruin (2 Pet. ii. 15); Jude classes him with Cain and

Korah (ver. 11) ; and John, in the Apocalypse (ii. 14) distinctly marks him out as a type of evil.

These illustrations will suffice to show what is, properly speaking, to be understood by the injunction to compare Scripture with Scripture ; and it is in making such comparisons that a well-prepared collection of parallel passages may prove of very great service.

The phrase, 'ANALOGY OF FAITH,' or, interpreted according to the analogy or rule of faith, implies something more. It means, when rightly understood, that Scripture must be interpreted in harmony with itself—that is, with its entire teaching. Paul implies this when he says that the death of Christ is a fact or doctrine, 'according to the Scriptures' (1 Cor. xv. 3, 4) ; and so again Peter in the Acts, where he speaks of Christ's sufferings as being in harmony with 'those things which God before had showed *by the mouth of all his Prophets*' (Acts iii. 18).

So, among ourselves, if any man expound the doctrine of a free justification without the works of the law, as if it absolved from obligation to holiness, he does so in direct contradiction of the analogy of faith, or, in other words, in defiance of the general spirit and teaching of Scripture.

What we have to guard against is, allowing parallel references to mislead us by *false associations*,—by merely *verbal* resemblances,—by guiding us, however unwittingly, into a *given line* of thought,—by forming a sort of *commentary* for us ; and, under pretence of enabling us to interpret according to the analogy of faith, by keeping us *in harmony*, not so much with Truth itself, as with what *Christians generally suppose to be* the spirit of Revelation, as it may happen to be embodied in the particular system of theology which is at any given time popular in religious circles.



CHAPTER XXX.

ON DOUBTS AND DIFFICULTIES.

“ Strong Son of God, immortal Love,
Whom we that have not seen Thy face,
By faith, and faith alone, embrace,
Believing where we cannot prove;—

“ We have but faith : we cannot *know* ;
For knowledge is of things we see ;
And yet we trust it comes from Thee,
A beam in darkness : let it grow.”

TENNYSON.

WHY God, in giving us a revelation of His Will in and through a Book, should have left so much room for *doubt* in relation to certain portions, or allowed so many *difficulties* to gather about its communications, is a question sometimes asked, amid pain and perplexity, in the deepest recesses of Christian hearts.

The true answer, whenever we find it, will certainly be this,—‘ Because it was wiser and better that it should be so.’

Let us see whether reflection will not enable us, in some degree, to *perceive* this, even now.

We need scarcely say that DOUBT is not a plant of modern growth, nor is it to be associated only with a Written Revelation. It was felt by Old Testament Seers, and it was experienced by New Testament Prophets, Asaph frequently expresses one form of it,—‘ Verily,’ he

says, 'I have cleansed my heart in vain;' in vain have 'I washed my hands in innocency.' 'When I thought to understand this,' he adds, 'it was too painful for me. (Psa. lxxiii.). Again, under the same influence, he exclaims, 'Doth His promise fail for evermore?' (Psa. lxxvii. 8). And although it appears that he soon found rest and peace in a reposing faith, it is not the less true that he was, for a time, under the influence of the most painful of all doubts,—that of God's faithfulness.

Jeremiah, in distress, is equally perplexed when he cries,—'Wherefore doth the way of the wicked prosper?' and he is desirous, as it were, to reason with God on the incomprehensibleness of His judgments (xii. 1). And again 'We looked for peace, and there is no good; and for the time of healing, and behold trouble!' 'Break not thy covenant with us:'—as if such a thing were possible with God (xiv. 19—21). Nay, stronger still,—'O Lord, thou hast deceived me, and I was deceived' (xx. 7). In all these cases *doubt* was temporary, and followed by renewed confidence; *but it was there*.

John the Baptist furnishes us with an example of another kind of doubt. Depressed in his spirit,—disappointed in his hopes,—and distrusting even the evidence of the voice from Heaven, he sends his disciples to Jesus with the touching inquiry,—'Art thou He that should come, or do we look for another?'

Thomas furnishes us with an example different from any of the preceding,—the other disciples say unto him, 'We have seen the Lord!' He replies, disbelieving the testimony in spite of its unanimity, and notwithstanding the confidence he justly reposed in the veracity of his brethren,—'Except I shall see in His hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails,

and thrust my hand into His side, I will not believe' (John xx. 25).

The Apostles frequently manifest a sceptical spirit, and it is strikingly displayed in the walk to Emmaus,—‘ We trusted that it had been He which should have redeemed Israel’ (Luke xxiv. 21). The implication is unavoidable, —we have given up that belief now.

Let us not, then, imagine that *doubt* would have found no place in our hearts had Revelation been, in any respect, different from what it is.

A more important inquiry rises before us. What is the moral character of doubt? Is it, in itself, *sinful*? Is it always injurious to him who suffers from it?

The character of the reply to this question must depend on the character of the doubt. Is it *honest* doubt? Is it a doubt which desires to be removed by evidence? or is it a cherished habit of mind, traceable to conceit, or levity, or dislike to that which is asserted? Everything depends on this:—If it is *honest*, it is painful; if it is *dishonest*, it will be a source of satisfaction, like self-complacency. If it is *sincere*, it will be temporary, and the soul will have no rest until the truth or falsehood of the matter to be inquired into is ascertained. If it is *affected*, it will be chronic, and, to a great extent, indifferent as to any definite conclusion whatever. It *must* be the one or the other. It is either the most sacred agony of a noble nature, or the veriest trifling of a fool.

Of course we speak now of doubt in relation to *moral* truth,—for in this book reference to any other kind would be out of place; and of this, if honest and sincere, we fearlessly affirm that it is *not sin*, but the trial by fire of God’s own children. They may look upon it as foolishness or ignorance when once freed from it, but they only free

themselves from it by *facing* it and going into the sanctuary of God to wrestle it off.

It is of doubt like this that the Laureate sings,—

‘There lives more faith in honest doubt,
Believe me, than in half the Creeds.’

and it was in relation to *such* scepticism that old John Newton was accustomed to say,—‘Some men’s doubts are better than other men’s certainties.’

In no instance is this class of doubt dealt with as a sin in Scripture.

The Lord only answers the Baptist with *additional evidence*;—‘Go and show John again those things which ye do hear and see: The blind receive their sight, and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, and the poor have the Gospel preached to them. And blessed is he, who shall not be offended in me’ (Matt. xi. 4—6).

To Thomas He is condescending beyond measure. Not a word of rebuke. It is simply,—‘Thomas, reach hither thy finger, and behold my hands; and reach hither thy hand, and thrust it into my side: and be not faithless, but believing.’ And yet there is commendation for men of a different stamp. ‘Blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed’ (John xx. 27—29).

To the two disciples, ‘fools, and slow of heart,’ as they were, ‘to believe all that the Prophets had spoken,’ He kindly expounds, ‘in all the Scriptures, the things concerning Himself;’ and then, without one word of reproach, sits down with them to meat, and makes Himself known in breaking of bread. Is it possible he could have thus acted had doubt, in itself, been sinful? had not a living faith, so to speak, lain deeper than the doubt?

As has been well said by the lay writer to whom we

have already been indebted, 'the absence of positive faith and of righteous doubt are exactly correlative. They are twin symptoms of the same decadence.' 'I hardly know,' he adds, 'one young man who has strength and courage enough for righteous doubt. There is plenty of indifference, plenty of denial, plenty of cool passing by of whatever cannot be understood, plenty of complacent setting up or adoption of new philosophical theories; but of *the resolute struggle for Truth*, very little. Perhaps it has been undergone once on some subordinate point, and the result having been that the truth has been found to dwell *outside* of some preconceived opinion, the conclusion has been come to that it dwells, probably, outside of *all* received opinions, and that, from the moment one has left these, anything that looks like truth may very likely be true, so that it is no longer worth struggling with.'

From the remarks we have already made, it will be seen that, far from considering doubt to be in itself sinful, we regard it, when righteous, honest, and sincere, as eminently *helpful to Truth*; and therefore we see no ground whatever for surprise that God should have left so much room for its exercise in reference to Divine Revelation.

Greatly is it to be regretted that the Bishop of Oxford, in his recent Sermons on 'the Revelation of God the Probation of Man,' should have spoken regarding it so unadvisedly as he has. Admitting, as he does, that 'God's Word is spoken to us, and recorded for us, through the intervention of human agents,—that it is recorded in human manuscripts, read by us out of a printed book, and that at every turn there is opportunity for doubt and question,' the Bishop has nothing better to offer to the doubter than the advice,—appropriate enough in the mouth of a Romish Priest, but altogether out of character in a Pro-

testant Prelate,—‘Fling doubt from you as if it were a loaded shell shot into the fortress of the soul ; do not intermit prayer, be more frequent at Communion, frequently repeat the *Gloria Patri*,’—in short, for this is what it amounts to,—‘Do not venture to examine into Truth,—believe, on the authority of the Church, and be at rest.’ *

As if this violent and unnatural suppression of doubt were equivalent to Faith ; as if God’s revelation of Himself in the Bible were given for the purpose of paralyzing the intellect, and prostrating humanity at the feet of a Priest ; as if all history did not teach us that ‘conscientious doubt, when suppressed, eats into the soul like a cancer, and that the inevitable result is latent infidelity, and the total corruption of the moral and spiritual nature.’

The difficulties of Scripture, then, have their use. They tend to promote a constant and ever fresh investigation into its claims and its contents ; they call for the exercise of humility, patience, candour, and charity, in such investigations ; and they teach us that great lesson which is writ-

* ‘Good men not unfrequently make a secret treaty with their consciences to this effect, viz., that in whatever efforts they may make for saving Christianity, they will place in the very fore-front of their labours, this the most sacred of all principles or universal axioms—*salvá Ecclesiá*. And what is this ‘*Ecclesia*,’ for the preservation of which all things in heaven and earth must be compromised or put in peril ? It is not the Church universal,—it is nothing that is itself great, bright, fair, pure, or worthy to be lived and died for. It is an ‘idol of the den,’—it is that to which *we* have chosen to pin our self-idolatry, our arrogance, our despotic temper.

‘So it has been with a succession of great and honest men, from Augustine to our times. What availed that noble work, the *Civitas Dei*, in stemming the torrent of superstition and confusion which so soon after deluged Africa and the western world ? Little or nothing. Read the African Salvian and find your answer. Respectfully we would here say—Think of this, whoever it may be now, in this crisis of Christian belief, in whose secret unconfessed purposes this same maxim or principle may crouch—save Christianity—*salvá Ecclesiá*.’—*North British Review*, LXX.

ten, as it were, in letters of light alike on God's works and on His Word, that advance in knowledge depends, far more than we are usually prepared to admit, on the state of the heart; that if we are often left, in our search after evidence, to balance probabilities, and to be misled, if we allow pride or prejudice to come between us and Truth; it is only to teach us that our moral probation, as creatures of God, extends far beyond mere outward acts; that the search after Truth is an important part of it; and that the office of the intellectual faculty is *not* to sit in judgment upon God, but humbly to receive, on the authority of heaven, teachings which are necessarily hidden from all who close their eyes to the demand a *Divine* Revelation makes *on their obedience*, and who shut its light out of their souls, only lest it should make their shortcomings too manifest even to themselves.

O Lord Christ, who didst, when on earth, mercifully bear with the doubts of Thy disciples; pity, we beseech Thee, the questionings of them that love Thee; and so enlighten us by Thy Holy Spirit, that, perfectly believing all which Thou hast given us, our faith in Thy sight may never be reprov'd, but that we may abide in Thee evermore, through Jesus Christ, our Lord and Saviour.



CHAPTER XXXI.

ON READING THE SCRIPTURES WITH PRAYER.

“ Within this awful Volume lies
The mystery of mysteries !
Happiest they of human race,
To whom God has granted grace
To read, to fear, to hope, to pray,
To lift the latch and force the way ;
And better had they ne'er been born,
Who read to doubt, or read to scorn.”

WALTER SCOTT.

MISS BREMER, in one of her later works, tells us that an interview with the Pope,—during which the claims of the Catholic Church had been earnestly pressed by the Venerable Father—closed with these words, addressed to her by his Holiness :—

‘ Pray, pray for light from the Lord, for grace to acknowledge the Truth ; because this is the only means of attaining to it. Controversy will do no good. In controversy is pride and self-love. People, in controversy, make a parade of their knowledge,—of their acuteness,—and after all, every one continues to hold his own views. Prayer alone gives light and strength for the acquirement of truth and grace. Pray every day ; every night, before you go to rest ; and I hope that grace and light may be given to you. For

God wishes that we should humble ourselves, and He gives His grace to the humble. And now God bless and keep you for time and eternity.'

The accomplished Swedish lady,—good Protestant as she is,—adds, 'This pure, priestly, and fatherly admonition was so beautifully and fervently expressed, that it went to my heart. The Pope was to me *really*, at this moment, the representative of the Teacher who in life and doctrine preached humility, not before men, but before God, and taught mankind to pray to Him. The Pope's words were entirely true and evangelical.'

Such is the process by which *perverts* to Rome are multiplied. Is there not something wrong about it? Is Miss Bremer's view sound and Scriptural? Are the words of Pius, after all, either true or evangelical?

We think not. In similar tones and language, many an old Rabbi would, in our Lord's time, have addressed a young disciple of Christ, in order to win him back to the old faith; and, in similar terms, many a self-satisfied religionist *still* warns and rebukes the inquiring spirit.

But *wherein* is it wrong? Is it not true that our first duty *is* to pray for light and grace? Unquestionably it is. Further,—Is it not true that, for the most part, in controversy there is much pride and self-love? and that men engaged in it often seek rather to display their acuteness than anything else? It cannot be disputed that such is too frequently the case.

Wherein, then, lies the error? For, if it be an error, it is one that is shared by thousands of Protestants in the present day, who are constantly teaching that all controversy is evil; that doubt is sinful; that free inquiry inevitably leads to scepticism; and that he who would arrive at Truth must do so by abasing his rational faculties, and by

reading his Bible 'on his knees,' rather than in his library ; in the light of devotion, rather than in that of research ; with the intellect at rest, rather than alert and quickened ; with prayer, rather than with pains.

The error, as we imagine, lies in the supposition, implied, perhaps, rather than expressed, that devout submission and intellectual activity are somewhat opposed to each other ; that the two cannot, if each be quickened, co-exist,—the one being, in fact, destructive of the other ; and that, consequently, free inquirers *must*, as a rule, be a prayerless race.

But is it true that the intellect and the devout affections are thus opposed ?—that *independent* research and prayer cannot really go on together ?

The answer to the question must depend on the character of the prayer supposed to be offered. If a man, in praying over his Bible, asks for, and really expects to obtain, *direct spiritual illumination* ; if he imagine that, in reply to his petitions, *his judgment* will, in some way or other, be so acted upon, that Truth will present itself to his intellect, and carry its own evidence with it ; if, with the Fathers, he considers that the influence of the Holy Spirit, for which he prays, will be vouchsafed in the form of *intellectual light* ; if, with some eminent modern divines, he regards the 'Faith' for which he entreats, to be 'a new faculty,' 'a Divine capacity,' imparted only as a sovereign gift,—it then follows, of course, that the more *passive* he is, the better ; that self-annihilation, were it possible, would be, of all things, the most desirable ; that 'creaturely activity,' as it is sometimes called, is a hindrance to the reception of the Divine blessing ; and that prayer stands in direct opposition to the exercise of reason.

This has always been the doctrine of the Church of Rome. It manifests itself most, in the most devout of her children

It is the distinguishing characteristic of the 'quietists' and 'mystics' in her communion, of all ages; and it has always had a charm for devout Protestants of meditative temperament, who do not perceive the poison that it embodies. We may, and we ought to, sympathize with Madame Guyon, when (as translated by Cowper) she sings,—

“ Sweet to lie passive in Thy hand,
And know no will but Thine.”

But we must not forget that the gifted Jansenist *meant* much more than we do by the words she uses; that her passiveness related not merely to the dispensations of God's Providence, but to the knowledge of His Word; and that it pointed to, and terminated in, an abject submission to Priestly rule and guidance.

It could not be otherwise. Believing, as she did, that God required her to pray, but not to think for herself,—to be devout, but not to question,—it followed, as of necessity, that she became the slave of men whom she supposed to be the appointed depositories of Divine Truth.

With Protestants, however mystic they may be, the case is somewhat different. Believing, as they do,—and truly,—that the Holy Spirit is given *individually* to every earnest seeker; and expecting this great boon—as they have no warrant for doing,—in the form of direct intellectual light; *they bow*,—not before a visible Church represented by a Priest,—but before *what is neither more nor less human*, the reflex action of their own piety, whether it be intelligent or unintelligent, on their intellects.

The *heart*, in all such cases, guides the *head*,—and the result corresponds. If the heart be lowly, loving, and pure, the intellectual conviction, whatever it may be, will not be inconsistent with anything that is loving and pure.

But, if the heart be but partially renewed,—if the man be still, more or less, under the influence of pride, vanity, conceit, uncharitableness, love of power, or self-seeking in any form,—the result will be in accordance. The *more* he prays, the deeper will be his satisfaction with his own views; the stronger his confidence in himself, as one ‘taught of God;’ the more malignant will be his fanaticism, his sectarianism, or his superstition, as the case may be.

Again we say,—*It cannot be otherwise.* Believing, like the Romanist, that God requires him simply to pray, and wait for a light above and beyond any that he can get by the use of his rational faculties, however much these may be disciplined by labour, or purified by a right state of heart, he tries to lay aside his reason, and, if it were possible, not to think his own thoughts, in order that he may passively receive from above ‘the Truth as it is in Jesus.’ He never considers that, from the course he is taking, he will necessarily be *acted upon* by forces, which, however Divine he may deem them, are really as human as any by which he is in other ways affected.

But let us suppose another case. Let us suppose that the praying man expects his answer from God in another form; that he has not the slightest expectation of obtaining light, apart from a vigorous and independent use of his faculties; that as, when he asks God for daily bread, he only expects to receive it in the form of a blessing on his industry, his skill, his perseverance, and his trust in God: so, in spiritual things, if, when he prays that the ‘eyes of his understanding’ may be ‘opened,’ he expects his answer only in the form of that ‘eye-salve’ (humility) with which the eye must be ‘anointed,’ if it would see (Rev. iii. 18),—in the form of *purification* from the various phases of evil that darken and becloud the faculties of a sinful man; if

he bear in mind the words of his Lord,—‘If thine eye be single, thy whole body shall be full of light;’ if he look, therefore, for his answer, in growing freedom from prejudice, in a greater breadth of charity, in a more loving appreciation of Truth and goodness, wherever they are found; and consequently (a *necessary* consequence), through the reception of these ‘fruits of the Spirit,’ to have a clearer intellect, a sounder judgment, a better balanced mind; the reverse of all we have stated then becomes true. Prayer and intellectual activity go on together, and as, on the first supposition, they could not co-exist, so, on this, they cannot be separated.

But which is the *true* view?

For a reply we simply turn to ‘the Book,’ and to ‘the Master.’

The Jews come to Christ with their doubts. What is His reply? Pray? No! It is ‘Search! (or rather, Ye search) the Scriptures: they are they which testify of me’ (John v. 39). Again, He says to them, ‘I am come in my Father’s Name, and ye receive me not.’ Why? Because ye do not pray? No! The cause of unbelief is thus stated,—‘How *can* ye believe, which receive honour one of another, and seek not the honour that cometh from God’ (ver. 44). ‘To this end was I born, and for this cause came I into the world, that I should bear witness unto *the Truth*. Every one that is of *the Truth* heareth my voice’ (John xviii. 37).

Paul, at Thessalonica, when dealing with UNBELIEVERS, does not call upon them to pray; but, ‘*as his manner was*, went in unto them, and three sabbath days *reasoned* with them out of the Scriptures’ (Acts xvii. 2). So, again, at Corinth, ‘he *reasoned* in the synagogue every sabbath day, and persuaded the Jews and the Greeks’ (xviii. 4). Again,

at Ephesus, we are told 'he entered into the synagogue, and *reasoned* with the Jews.' And so, before Felix, he '*reasoned* of righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come,' till 'Felix trembled' (xxiv. 25).

Nor is his method different with BELIEVERS. Complaining of some, that, when they 'ought to have been teachers,' it was needful to teach them 'which be the first principles of the oracles of God,' he adds, 'Strong meat (the full comprehension of the supercession of the Mosaic law by Christ) belongeth to them that are of full age, even those who, *by reason of use*, have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil' (Heb. v. 14); *i. e.*, their faculties exercised by practice in the distinguishing of Truth from error (so Stuart and Alford).

How different, in this particular, is the conduct of the Apostle *before* his conversion. He then prayed and persecuted; while Stephen and the Christians, though ever living in the atmosphere of prayer, reasoned out of the Scriptures. Saul and the Priests, like the Popes, supplicated God, and threatened man. Stephen the martyr studied, and quoted, and followed the written Word. The Persecutor would have nothing to do with controversy.

After his conversion, Paul, as we all know, became a great controversialist. Some of his Epistles—that to the Galatians, for example—are almost wholly controversial. *Before* his great change, we look in vain for a *single argument* against heresy; for then, like the Papal chief, he only 'breathed out threatenings and slaughter.' It was not till he became a Christian that he felt the necessity of giving a 'reason for the hope that was in him' (Acts xvii. 2, 17).

Nowhere in Scripture, either from the lips of Christ or His Apostles, is prayer set before us as the medium by and

through which Divine light is to be obtained.* *Everywhere* we are taught to pray for a right state of heart,—for pardon, for purity, for temporal and eternal good, for friends, for enemies, for all men, for a blessing from above on faithful teachers of the Gospel; but *nowhere* for light in the intellect; nowhere either for ‘a new faculty,’ or—which amounts to the same thing—for light above and beyond that which is open to all men. No such petition occurs in the prayer Jesus taught His disciples. Would we know God’s will, we are to be ‘babes,’ as distinguished from the ‘wise and prudent’ of this world; we are to be ‘obedient children;’ to seek for a renewed nature; for a ‘wise and understanding heart;’ for ‘a single eye;’ for ‘the fear of God;’ and for strength and assistance in the fulfilment of every duty. But nowhere are we taught to pray for *light*, except as it springs necessarily out of *love*.

It may be said, indeed, that in the Old Testament we are taught by Solomon to ‘cry after knowledge, and to lift up our voice for understanding;’ but then it is in connection with seeking for it, as the miner seeks for silver, by long and unwearied toil. David, too prays, ‘Open thou mine eyes’ (Psa. cxix. 18); but the petition is in close alliance with others for humility (ver. 21), freedom from all mental insincerity (ver. 29), and a general quickening of the spiritual nature (ver. 25).

* We are most anxious not to be misunderstood here. We are only speaking of ‘Divine light’ in the sense of mental perception. Far be it from us to deny that, *in one sense*—the true and Scriptural sense—light from Heaven is essential to all of us. Our ignorance is often felt to be so oppressive, our perplexities so harassing, that it would be crushing indeed to one’s spirit, to feel that we were forbidden to pray for light. But not in the Pope’s sense can we rightly do so. The light we need, and the only light God warrants us to expect, is that of love and purity, freedom from pride, prejudice, self-interest, and sin,—the indwelling, in short, of the Holy Ghost.

It may be urged, also, that Paul prays for his converts that 'the word of Christ' may 'dwell' in them 'richly' (Col. iii. 16); that they may 'hold fast that which is good' (1 Thess. v. 21); that they may be 'filled' with 'the knowledge' of God's 'will' (Col. i. 9, 10); but all these petitions are but so many forms of desire for the sanctification of their natures; for increase of grace; and for the planting within them of all holy principles and dispositions. In not a single instance does he direct them to pray for such blessings as direct gifts from Heaven; but always to watch, to search, to be faithful to duty, to love Truth, and to follow it at all risks, not doubting but that in this path they would find it.

We have said nothing as to the danger of *unconsciously* praying over the Bible, *with the desire to find ourselves right*. Yet nothing is more common; and it is certain that *he who does so will generally succeed* in obtaining the object of his wishes. 'It is the same with Philosophy. If you have a strong *wish* to find phenomena such as to confirm the conjectures you have formed, and allow that wish to *bias* your examination, you are ill fitted for interrogating Nature.' So it is with the Bible. 'Revelation is to be interrogated, not as *a witness*, but as *an instructor*.'

What, then, do we learn from the whole? That Prayer is less important or influential on the mind of God than Christians generally have imagined? SURELY NOT.

'Prayer is the Christian's vital breath,
The Christian's native air,
His watchword at the gates of death,
He enters Heaven by Prayer.'

What we really learn is that, *in the acquisition of Truth*, Prayer occupies precisely the same position that it does in relation to the acquisition of *bread*; that as God *now*

showers not bread from heaven, as He did in the wilderness, so He showers not truth upon our minds, as He did upon the Apostles. And in each case for the same reason; because it is not called for. The labourer *has now*, what the Israelite in the desert had not,—the opportunity of gaining his bread ‘by the sweat of his brow;’ and *the Christian has now*, what the Christian in Apostolic days had not,—a complete revelation of the will of God in his hand, and nothing to hinder his understanding it, save his worldliness, selfishness, and sin.

For the removal of these hindrances let us all pray earnestly; assured that, only so far as they are removed by the Holy Spirit of God, shall we be able to discern ‘*wondrous things*’ in the Divine Law.

Almighty God, who through Thy only begotten Son Jesus Christ hast overcome death, and opened unto us the gate of everlasting life; grant us, by Thy Holy Spirit, to have a right judgment in all things; and give us grace so to acknowledge Thee, that we may evermore be kept steadfast in the faith. Teach us, O Lord, in reading Thy Holy Word, how to pray, and what to pray for; and grant that Thy Church, being always preserved from false Apostles, may be ordered and guided by faithful and true Pastors, through Jesus Christ our Lord..



CHAPTER XXII.

ON THE DIVISION OF SCRIPTURE INTO CHAPTERS AND VERSES,
WITH HEADINGS AND SUBSCRIPTIONS.

“ Thee unclosing, I find calmness
'Mid the heart's tempestuous fear ;
Thou art as the bow of pity,
Gleaming through the storm's career :
And the stillness of my spirit
Tells me heavenly joys are near.”

From the Italian, translated by Sheppard.

THESE divisions, it need scarcely be said, have nothing whatever to do with the *inspiration* of Scripture. They are purely human, and comparatively modern.

The *history* of this mechanical arrangement is soon told.

The Vulgate (the *Latin version* of Scripture) was the first divided into *chapters* ; a work undertaken by Cardinal Hugo in the thirteenth century,—as some think, by Langton, Archbishop of Canterbury, in 1227.

The *Hebrew* Scriptures were similarly divided by Mordecai Nathan in 1445.

The division of the New Testament into *verses* (for it was, as we have seen, already broken up into chapters) was accomplished by Robert Stevens, who is said to have completed his work in the year 1551, during a journey on horseback from Paris to Lyons. Whether it was accom-

plished literally while riding on horseback, or when resting at inns, is uncertain.

The *Hebrew* Scriptures were similarly broken up into verses by Athias in 1661.

The '*points or stops*,' in Scripture are also, for the most part, of modern date. '*Full stops*' are found in the earliest manuscripts; but our present system of punctuation dates from about the ninth century.

The '*Subscriptions*' annexed to the Epistles, such as 'The Second Epistle to the Thessalonians was written from Athens,' are also un-Apostolic, and not to be depended upon. They are often quite inaccurate; and sometimes directly contradict internal evidence. Dr. Mill tells us that these '*Subscriptions*' were added by an Egyptian Bishop, about the middle of the fifth century. Mr. Hartwell Horne says,—'Whoever was the author of them was either grossly ignorant or grossly inattentive. They are altogether wanting in some of the best ancient manuscripts, and in others they are greatly varied.'

The '*Headings to Chapters*' in our English Bibles are equally without authority, and sometimes they are quite untrustworthy; *e.g.*, the *heading* to the closing verses of the forty-second chapter of Isaiah is, in our Bibles, 'God reproveth the *people* of incredulity;' while that for the verses immediately following,—the earlier verses of the forty-third chapter,—is, 'The Lord comforteth *the Church* with His promises.' Yet it is quite plain that the whole is addressed to *one class* of persons, and ought to have been closely connected in the text.

The very same error is committed at the close of the forty-third chapter, and in the beginning of the forty-fourth; where, according to the heading, God 'reproveth *the people* as inexcusable,' and then 'comforteth *the Church*

with His promises.' No such separation, however, is found in the Prophet. He knows nothing of this distinction between Church and people. Well may Dr. Maitland say, 'this is not rightly dividing the Word of Truth, but cruelly *chopping* it.' In hundreds of instances, these headings, standing as they do in Bibles professedly published without note or comment, are not unfrequently commentaries of the worst description, because arbitrary, dogmatic, and unsuspected.

The divisions into Chapters and Verses, as they now stand, are so obviously imperfect, that it is scarcely needful to draw attention to the fact; but even when not absolutely inaccurate, they often tend to break the sense and to *obscure* the meaning; *e. g.*,—

(a) The description of the humiliation and glory of Christ by Isaiah really begins, *not* as it appears in the English version to do, with the fifty-third chapter, but at the *thirteenth verse* of the fifty-second.

(b) In Jeremiah, the *various prophecies* are frequently *confounded* by this division. An entirely *distinct* prophecy evidently commences at the *sixth verse of the third chapter*, which is nowhere shown in our Bible.

(c) In the New Testament, the *latter verses* of the *ninth* chapter of Matthew evidently belong to the *tenth*; and the *first verse* of the *fourth* chapter of the Colossians as plainly belongs to the *third* chapter.

The Epistle to the Hebrews affords a striking example of the serious hindrance to the understanding of the argument, which is sometimes placed in the way of the reader by breaking an Epistle into chapters. Most of the passages in this Epistle begin with,—'Wherefore,' 'For,' or, 'Therefore;' so that the reader who confines himself to one or more chapters, often *begins* with a *conclusion from an argu-*

ment, or an *argument* for a proposition which he has not read; and reads a proposition or an argument stopping short of the conclusion. And yet, such is the power of habit and prejudice, that many would not be content with reading it in any other form; they would fancy that its *sacredness* had been taken away.

An intelligent reader of Scripture will find many more such examples; and it can scarcely be doubted that the tendency of them is to *darken* the sense. Yet these divisions have been so generally adopted, that both in public worship, and in the selection of portions for family or private reading of the Scriptures, we generally take one or more *chapters*, without any reference to the connection.

It may, indeed, be said, that a Christian who sets himself seriously to study the Word of God, will pay little or no attention to these divisions. This may be true; but a great part of those who read the Bible do not read studiously; and even those who do, may find it easier to break off a bad habit, than to get rid of all the ill effects of it. These divisions are so familiar to us, that it is difficult, if not impossible, to read the Bible as if we had never known them, even when we are aware of their mischievous effects, which readers in general most certainly are not.

The early Christians had indeed titles and heads to their Bibles, but the object was simply to point out the general contents, not to divide for reference. Many of these chapters contained only a few verses, and some of them not more than one.

But it will be said, Are not these divisions of great use? Unquestionably they are. To pretend that no advantage has been derived from such an arrangement would be simply absurd. It is certainly *very convenient* for reference, especially in connection with a Concordance, and it is therefore

wisely retained, by side-notes, in Bibles which are printed on another plan, and are generally known as 'Paragraph Bibles.'

The greatest evil, probably, that has arisen from the breaking up of Scripture into portions, is the encouragement it has afforded to the common, but bad habit, of reading the Bible *in fragments*, oftentimes as unconnected as the pages of any other book would be, if separated from that which precedes and follows them.

If we add to this habitual *mangling* of the Word of Truth, the scarcely less evil of *textual preaching*, which has probably been greatly promoted by the same cause, it will be found difficult to overstate the amount of mischief which has been thus produced and perpetuated.

Blessed Lord, who hast caused all Holy Scriptures to be written for our learning; grant that we may in such wise read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest them; that by patience, and comfort of Thy Holy Word, we may embrace, and ever hold fast, the blessed hope of everlasting life, which Thou hast given us in our Saviour, Jesus Christ.



CHAPTER XXXIII.

HOW HELPS MAY BECOME HINDRANCES.

“ Some critics furnish comment spun as fine
As bloated spiders draw the flimsy line :
If stubborn Greek refuse to be their friend,
Hebrew or Syriac shall be forc'd to bend.
If languages and copies all cry, No!
Somebody proved it centuries ago.
Like trout pursued, such sophists, in despair,
Dart to the mud, and find their safety there.”

COWPER.

UNDER the term ‘Helps’ to the understanding of Scripture, we include, not merely books specially written for the purpose of facilitating its study, but all *standard Commentaries* and theological manuals,—the *devotional writings* both of Anglicans and Puritans, and approved *works of practical piety* generally ; for books of this character, commonly sway mankind more powerfully in the views they take of Holy Scripture, than works expressly prepared with a view to its elucidation.

To books, must be added an agency more powerful still,—that of the *living voice*, sounding, Sunday after Sunday, from the pulpits of the Established Church, and among all shades of Nonconformists. It is scarcely possible to exaggerate the extent of influence exercised in this way over religious opinion.

We are not disposed to *undervalue* any of these 'means of grace,' as they are ordinarily termed. In many cases, the amount of blessing thus imparted is greater than human arithmetic can calculate; in others, it may be doubtful whether the *apparent* benefit is as real as it seems to be; and in some, the influence is unquestionably bad. But, *as a whole*, there can be little doubt that *sermonizing*, with all its weakness, is a public benefit, and a mainstay of the religion of our land, *such as it is*.

Our object is not to depreciate the value of either books or men, regarded as teachers of Divine Truth; it is simply to show how easily these 'helps'—for such they certainly are when rightly used—may become 'hindrances,' if trusted in without discrimination,—substituted for personal responsibilities,—or merely leaned upon as pillows of indolence.

Even of books *specially intended to facilitate* Scriptural investigation, it may be asserted, without paradox, that they are sometimes at once both helps and hindrances; *helps* in one direction, *hindrances* in another.

Such we believe to be the case, notwithstanding their acknowledged excellences, with many 'critical introductions' to the Bible. They *help* us, by the information they impart; they *hinder*, by the impression they leave that Holy Scripture can scarcely be understood without a prolonged course of preparatory acquisition.

How, it may well be said, can it be expected that *ordinary readers* should ever be qualified to form any independent judgment respecting the teachings of a Book, for the interpretation of which upwards of *three hundred rules*, occupying in their statement and illustration nearly two hundred closely printed octavo pages, are found in a work so able and yet so popular as that of Mr. Hartwell Horne? How can it be supposed that *laymen*, occupied as

they are every day in the active duties of life, will ever be *able*,—whatever their wishes may be,—to enter into discussions on the ‘literal sense,’ the ‘allegorical sense,’ and the ‘spiritual sense’ of Scripture; into ‘laws for ascertaining’ the meaning of words and phrases, and the ‘arrangement of emphasis;’ into inquiries about ‘scholiasts and glossographers;’ into ‘canons’ for investigating ‘scope’ or context, ‘analyses,’ ‘antiquities,’ ‘chronology,’ and ‘the analogy of faith;’ into explanations of ‘tropes and figures,’—of ‘metonymy,’ whether ‘of cause, effect, subject, or adjunct,’—of ‘metaphors and their sources,’—of ‘synecdoche, irony, and hyperbole;’ of ‘types, parables, and prophecy;’ of ‘internal and external evidences;’ and, finally, of ‘principles for practical application.’ Yet such, and nothing less, is the vastness of the apparatus deemed to be necessary in order to understand aright the Divine Message.

We are not to be supposed, for a single moment, to look with contempt on any of these branches of inquiry. They all have their place in the course of a student’s preparation for life, and form part of that mental discipline by which the human mind is enlarged and strengthened. But, just as ‘critical analyses of the English language,’—which have little to do with a plain man’s comprehension of his mother tongue,—often create an impression on the mind of the untaught, that some mysterious light is by such processes developed, so, ordinary readers of Scripture are apt to conclude that, apart from critical investigations of the kind referred to, the Bible can never be properly understood.

Lest we should be suspected,—however unjustly,—of despising the labours of the learned in this particular, we will state what we have further to say on the matter, only

in the words of men justly held in the highest repute for their attainments.

That eminent scholar, Dr. Maitland, thus wrote thirty years ago :—

‘ I must add my belief that *the cumbersome apparatus of systematic interpretation* ought to be placed among the impediments to the right understanding of the Word of God. The learning and labour which have been bestowed on it, seem to me to have been worse than wasted ; and so far from its helping towards the understanding of the Word of God, it appears more calculated to puzzle and perplex the student, and to supply, to those who may desire it, the means of confounding common sense, and perverting the plain text of Scripture.’

‘ These systematic schemes ’ (referring, especially, to Waterland’s Preface to his ‘ Scripture Vindicated ’), he says, ‘ are probably unknown to most readers of the Bible, and, therefore, do not *directly* form an impediment to them ; but it is obvious, that complex machinery which they never saw, and could not understand, may have a great effect on the manufactured article of which they are the consumers.’

‘ Some persons, I believe, have thought that they put honour on the Word of God, and the language in which it is written, by telling us that there is *something* ‘ in the original ’ which no translation can reach,—something not transfusable, not expressible. No doubt this is true, as regards every language, and every book in every language, unless it is confined to the most common subjects, and written in the lowest style. In most cases, *the curious felicity* of one language cannot be transferred to another, without using such periphrasis, or making such nonsense, as is peculiarly unfelicitous ; but so far as regards *meaning*, where meaning is of importance, and the mode of expres-

sion of secondary consideration, or none at all, anything written in one language may be made intelligible in another, provided the things spoken of are known to the translator, and the persons for whom he translates.'

For *recent testimony* in the same direction we turn to the University of Oxford, and there we find one of no mean eminence thus expressing himself:—

'Who would write a bulky treatise about the method to be pursued in interpreting Plato or Sophocles? No man, assuredly, who did not wish to create the impression that the meaning of these writers was beyond the comprehension of ordinary readers. And *this is precisely what has been done in relation to Scripture*. People have come to believe that without a formidable critical apparatus it is not possible to arrive at the meaning of God's Word: whereas the reverse is nearer the truth. The plain and unsophisticated reader is *far more likely* to get at the true interpretation than the learned student. For the true use of interpretation is to get rid of interpretation, and to leave us alone in company with the Author.

'When the meaning of Greek words is once known, the young student has almost all the *real materials* which are possessed by the greatest Biblical scholars, in the Book itself. *The great thing, after all, is to perceive the meaning of words in reference to their context*. Less weight should be given to Lexicons,—that is, to the authority of other Greek writers,—and more to the context. It is no exaggeration to say that he who, in the present state of knowledge, will confine himself to the plain meaning of words, and the study of their context, may know more of the original spirit and intention of the Authors of the New Testament, than all the controversial writers of former ages put together.'

The verbal critic magnifies his art. There is a scholasticism of Philology as well as a scholasticism of Philosophy. Words are often studied too minutely,—made to mean too much,—refinements of signification are drawn out of them. There seems, indeed, to be good reason for doubting whether any considerable light can be thrown on the New Testament from inquiring into the language. It has not been sufficiently considered that the difficulties of the New Testament are, for the most part, common to the Greek and the English. The noblest translation in the world has, indeed, a few great errors, and these, more than half of them, in the text; but we only do the Book violence to haggle over the words.*

Once more we return to Dr. Maitland.

‘The Bible,’ he says, ‘has long been the subject of discussion by the learned and the unlearned; and some of each class have left no stone unturned to make it appear that certain parts mean what they certainly do not mean. These persons are assisted, in the New Testament, by having a vast number of Greek writers, of various countries and ages, by whose help to find or to make a required meaning. The critic shows that the word in question is used in a variety of senses by different writers; and it is hard if he cannot twist some one of them into a resemblance of what he wishes. Thus an overwhelming mass of what is called ‘BIBLICAL CRITICISM’ is heaped upon the Word of God, and explanation after explanation too often only makes the matter darker than it was before.

‘Truth is single; and therefore one is right, and the rest, how many soever they may be, are wrong. A good deal of the evil of this arises, I imagine, from vanity, coupled with

* The Rev. B. Jowett, Regius Professor of Greek in the University of Oxford.

the affectation of modesty. The commentator frequently knows not what to say; but is unwilling to confess this without showing that he knows what others have said. His own mind is altogether *dissatisfied* with their explanations, *yet he recounts them*; and without saying of some (as he really ought, if he mentions them at all), that they are mere nonsense, not worth a moment's notice, he affects to leave it to the reader to choose what explanation he pleases. A simple mind is thus bewildered, and perhaps almost led to a vague idea, that what has so many interpretations, all thought worthy of record, has not, in fact, any very certain or definite meaning at all.'

And all this folly and confusion arises from attempts which have been too successfully made, to raise an opinion that the Bible is not to be judged of by the rules of common sense; forgetting the fact, that learning can obscure as well as illustrate, and heap up chaff when it can find no more wheat.

Thus far we have sustained our position by the authority of eminent men in the Church of England. We now add a few words of Nonconformist testimony.

'Startling,' says an able writer in the *Eclectic Review* (Nov., 1860), 'as the fact sounds when enunciated, *the Christian Church in the nineteenth century cannot point the student of the Sacred Scriptures to a single recognized principle of Biblical Interpretation.*' Who can wonder at the avowal that follows?—'The readings and the findings of the private Christian are often *in advance* of the expositions and instructions of the public teacher.'

When once this fact is fully recognized, the false notion—now all but universally held—that the one Divinely appointed means of Christian edification is SACRED ORATORY, delivered from the pulpit, will be shaken to its foundation.

It will then be seen that while popular speaking, when effective, is admirably adapted to awaken the attention of the careless, to interest the young and uninformed, to kindle the affections, and to move to action, it is altogether unsuited to advanced Christians; is incapable of *leading them on* to deep personal acquaintance with Divine Truth; and, after a season, all but certain to become a *hindrance* to spiritual *growth*. This happens, because it is commonly abused by the indolent; because it occupies, in the esteem of multitudes, the place of personal investigation; and because—being associated with united worship—it almost inevitably becomes the *only* living channel of religious impression.

Nothing is more certain than this,—that whatever want seems to be supplied to a man *while in a passive condition*, he will never seek to satisfy by active effort. Yet it is quite as true in religious matters, as it is in everything else, that, without labour and discipline, all direct instruction must be unavailing and useless. The most elaborate and manifold apparatus can impart nothing of importance to the passive and inert mind. It is almost as unavailing as the warmth and light of the sun, and all the sweet influences of the heavens, when shed upon the desert sands. A mind, even if it be *filled* with the results of other men's labours, can, as Dr. Beattie remarks, 'only be compared to a well-filled granary; it bears no resemblance to the fruitful field, which multiplies that which is cast into its lap a thousandfold.'

Hitherto we have proceeded on the supposition that the teaching thus imparted,—although too oratorical,—is, on the whole, sound and sensible. But that it is not *always* so, is but too well known. Ministers themselves not unfrequently complain of the immeasurable mischief which is inflicted by much of our popular preaching on the cause of

Bible interpretation. An ingenious twist is often valued more than a true explanation. The words of the text in such cases merely supply *a theme*, neither preacher nor hearers ever troubling themselves about its meaning. The reason for this course is, that the text is wanted merely for the purpose of communicating some moral or religious lesson, determined upon beforehand; or for the support of some cause which the preacher may be pleading, or to condemn some error which he has to combat. As has been well remarked,—‘ Any one who has ever written sermons is aware how hard it is to apply Scripture to the wants of the hearers, and, at the same time, to preserve its meaning.’

This sort of perversion is bad enough when united, as it often is, with deep earnestness, solid learning, and much oratorical power; but how intolerable it becomes, when combined with ignorance and folly, vanity and conceit, will be fully admitted by all who have been obliged to listen, as too many have, to expositions of Scripture which, from their astounding stupidity, are only calculated to excite men to laughter or to scorn.

Who has not heard sermons in which the entire teaching has been made to turn altogether upon mere *emphasis*, applied in the most arbitrary manner to a single verse of Scripture? sermons, which remind one only of the sentence, dear to every schoolboy,—‘ Do you ride to town to-day?’ since it is one which, according as this or that word is made emphatic, admits of *five* different meanings, and is capable of being considered in *five* distinct relations, viz., to fact, to person, to mode, to place, and to time. *Seriously*, such is the treatment the Word of God too frequently receives at the hands of men who, themselves wanting common sense, are quite unconscious that others possess that Divine gift.



CHAPTER XXXIV.

CONCLUDING REMARKS.

“ As I read, my soul is conscious
Of a tender, deep surprise ;
Nor from bitter founts of sorrow
Gush the drops that dim these eyes ;
Holy Volume,—take the tribute
Which my tearful joy supplies.”

From the Italian—Sheppard's translation.

It may have occurred to some readers that, in the observations we have made, relative to the right understanding of Scripture, we have dealt too much with the *negative*, and too little with the *positive* side of the question ; that we have lingered long over supposed *hindrances*, but said little as to *helps* which may be obtained and confided in by humble inquirers.

The criticism is just. We have done so *advisedly* ; partly, because we think that previous writers on this subject, have, for the most part, taken no notice of the impediments we have endeavoured to lay bare ; and partly, because we are satisfied that little real help can be given to an intelligent reader of the Bible, beyond that which is afforded by pointing out the most obvious hindrances to its comprehension ; and by directing his attention generally to rocks and quicksands which, whether seen or unseen, form the main obstacle to the safe arrival of the heavenward traveller in the haven of Truth.

Yet not *exclusively* have we alluded to hindrances. Three or four great leading principles may certainly be gathered, from what we have, at different times, suggested as important to be borne in mind.

The *first* is, that in studying Scripture, and in connection with humble and prayerful dependence on 'the Giver of every good and perfect gift,'—it should be read *connectedly* and as a whole; with faculties alert and awakened; with *minute observation* of the often partially concealed *links of thought* which connect portion with portion; and with a constant reference to the *object* of the speaker or writer—the *character and circumstances* of the parties addressed,—and the *age or dispensation* to which the truth in question may be supposed specially to belong.

The *second* is, to acquire clear and distinct conceptions as to the precise meaning of what are sometimes termed the 'technicalities' of Scripture. As words of this class are used in different senses, their true meaning in any given case, can only be ascertained by carefully observing the connection in which they stand, and the obvious intention of the writer in using them.

The *third*,—implied rather than expressed,—is, to seek after the true import of Scripture *silences*, often more expressive than speech; and to weigh well the indirect *hints* which are scattered over the Bible, relative to events *pre-dicted*, but not yet fulfilled; such as the restoration of Israel,—the 'times of the restitution of all things,'—the bringing again of Sodom, Moab, and Edom,—the second coming of the Lord, and the universal subjection of mankind to His government.

Above all would we urge the *conscientious devotion of an adequate portion of time* to the general study of the Book, both alone and with others. And this with a view, not

only to personal edification, but to the improvement of all with whom we come in contact. No man will ever *learn*, who is determined beforehand not to teach. No man can know how little or how much he knows of any subject until he has attempted to *teach* it.

Diligence in this work will be sure of an abundant reward. *The Bible can never get behind the age.* It has treasures in it, many and great, *yet undiscovered.* Advance in acquaintance with it can only be made 'in the way in which all improvements are made; by thoughtful men's tracing on obscure hints—as it were, dropped us by nature accidentally, or which seem to come into our minds by chance.'*

It may finally be objected, that many things we have suggested as *means to understand* Scripture, are, in fact, *results* of prolonged examination; and that a somewhat extensive knowledge of the Book is *presupposed* as a necessary qualification for commencing its study.

Again we say,—the criticism is just. We have never imagined ourselves to be writing for persons who approach the Bible for the first time, or who take it up for perusal without any preconceived impressions as to its spirit or contents.

We have, throughout the entire book, taken it for granted that our readers will be persons who are, more or less, familiar with their Bibles; who have already received definite impressions as to its teachings, from a variety of sources; but who are, nevertheless, desirous of enlarging their acquaintance with the Sacred Record, and of correcting their prepossessions by fresh, and, as far as may be, independent examination.

We urge this task upon *all*,—whatever may be their

* Bishop Butler, "The Analogy," p. 2, c. iii.

supposed inability to accomplish it,—on ground applicable to many things, and expressed by a Heathen poet in the phrase, '*Vires acquirit eundo,*' strength is acquired in proceeding. Virgil, indeed, is speaking of rumour, which gathers force as it goes, but the sentiment is applicable to almost all human undertakings. If we would become acquainted with our ability to do a thing, we must patiently and perseveringly endeavour to accomplish it.

Neglect in the performance of any duty commonly entails, as its punishment, *the very inability* which is complained of. Our Lord says to the Jews, 'Yet a little while is the light with you. Walk while ye have the light, *lest darkness come upon you*' (John xii. 35). 'And that darkness *does* come. Not only is the light itself removed, but *there is a peculiar darkening of the eye in those who have the light and do not use it.* It is with the souls of such men, as it is with the bodies of certain lower animals, which have withdrawn themselves into rayless caverns, afar from the light of day: they were plainly formed by their Creator's hand to see; but their long absence from the light has obliterated the power of vision, so that, at times, even the very visual organs themselves become extinct. And so it is with these souls. The gradations are well-nigh imperceptible, but the end is sure.'*

* Sermons by the Bishop of Oxford, 'God's Revelation Man's Probation.'

O Almighty God, who alone canst order the unruly wills and affections of sinful men; grant unto Thy people that they may love the thing which Thou commandest, and desire that which Thou dost promise; that so, among the sundry and manifold changes of the world, our hearts may surely there be fixed, where true joys are to be found, through Jesus Christ our Lord.

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